

THEATRE INTERNATIONAL

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Arts and Humanities Group I Journal
Vol. XXI



Eds.

Subir Dhar, Tapu Biswas, Sheila T. Cavanagh, Papia Mitra

A

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In Memoriam

Shakespeare Society of Eastern India & Tagore-Gandhi Institute
mourns the passing away of



Amitava Roy
(1947–2024)

Professor Emeritus, Bankura University,
Former Shakespeare Professor & Head, Department of English,
Rabindra Bharati University,
Former Director, Shakespeare Centre for Advanced Research,
Rabindra Bharati University,
Executive President, Shakespeare Society of Eastern India,
Globally Renowned Theatre Director and Actor.
You left thousands of students and admirers disconsolate
on 12th April, 2024
Farewell and Rest in Peace after your journey's end.

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From the Editors' Desk

We are proud to announce that once again we have successfully gathered up the painstaking research of several scholars, young and old, and managed to published a garland, as it were, on performative arts. The topics range from the ever popular Shakespeare to Girish Karnad to Hindi films to stage techniques. However, a few novels have also been included since they incorporate dramatic techniques in their framework. We ask the readers to partake of this rich repast and enjoy at their leisure.

Dr Sheila T. Cavanagh examines two modern adaptations of *Macbeth*—David Greig's *Dunsinane* and Zinnie Harris' *Macbeth (an undoing)*—that reimagine Lady Macbeth's role. While Greig's *Dunsinane* envisions her survival and political maneuvering, Harris' *Macbeth (an undoing)* presents a revisionist narrative incorporating modern elements. Both reinterpret Shakespeare's work, emphasizing female agency, historical distortions, and cultural distinctions. Greig's play highlights the aftermath of Macbeth's fall, while Harris' adaptation employs contemporary language and themes. Cavanagh explores the historical and dramatic liberties taken by both playwrights in their efforts to reshape *Macbeth* for modern audiences.

Dr. Irom Gambhir Singh explores academic and critical review writing in the performing arts in Manipur, emphasizing their importance in documenting and analyzing theatre. It highlights methodologies such as historical analysis, ethnographic research, and performance analysis, using *Mythical Surrender* and *Lai-Haraoba* as case studies. It discusses the role of critical review writing in shaping public perception and providing constructive critique. The paper demonstrates the symbiotic relationship between academic and critical review writing, showing how they enhance the understanding and appreciation of theatre. Singh

illustrates how these methodologies help preserve and contextualize artistic expressions in Manipuri theatre.

Dr. Pangeijam Sanjeev analyzes RatanThiyam's adaptation of *Macbeth*, portraying the protagonist's relentless ambition as a metaphor for modern psychological affliction. Thiyam's production transforms the Scottish tragedy into a universal allegory of greed, paranoia, and destruction. The paper highlights Thiyam's innovative use of theatrical elements such as lighting, eerie settings, and symbolic props to depict the creeping madness and moral decay of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. Sanjeev argues that through a unique fusion of indigenous aesthetics and Shakespearean tragedy, Thiyam's *Macbeth* becomes a striking critique of human ambition and the inevitable downfall it brings in both historical and contemporary contexts.

Dr. Lopamudra Dey brings out Russia's deep engagement with *Hamlet*, tracing its influence from pre-revolutionary times to the post-Soviet era. Shakespeare's work was widely translated and adapted, with Hamlet resonating deeply with Russian writers like Pushkin and Dostoevsky. Soviet leaders, including Lenin, saw Shakespeare as relevant to class struggle. Various directors, including Boris Pasternak and Grigory Kozintsev, reinterpreted Hamlet in ways that reflected Russian sociopolitical realities. Dey observes that modern productions continue to portray the prince as a symbol of existential crisis, resistance, and self-exploration in ever-changing Russian cultural landscapes.

Dr. Awanish Rai & Madhukar Rai critically examine Girish Karnad's *Boiled Beans on Toast*, a play depicting Bangalore's rapid urbanization and its impact on different social classes. Karnad presents the city beyond its IT-hub stereotype, addressing migration, environmental degradation, and socio-economic disparities. The narrative follows diverse characters navigating modern urban struggles—displacement, alienation, and the erosion of traditional values. By weaving humor with critique, Karnad portrays how globalization affects personal relationships and social cohesion. The authors take the play as a commentary on the discontents of urban life, highlighting the complex interplay between progress and the loss of cultural identity.

Dr. Mausumi Sen Bhattacharjee offers a thought-provoking analysis of *Gandhi vs Tagore*, a play by Shailesh Parekh that dramatizes the ideological disagreements between two towering figures of Indian history. Through the clever use of a narrator and authentic letters exchanged between Gandhi and Tagore, the play stages a debate on nationalism, swaraj, and education. Bhattacharjee succeeds in positioning the play as a tool for fostering respectful dialogue on political and ethical question.

Dr. Tapu Biswas focuses on the translation and production history of Badal Sircar's *Baaki Itihas*, originally staged in Bengali in 1967. The play was translated into Hindi in 1968 by Nemi Chandra Jain and subsequently became widely performed. It explores themes of existential despair and the burden of historical guilt through the story of a struggling writer who becomes consumed by the suicide of his fictional character. The play's Hindi adaptation sparked critical discourse on its philosophical depth, with some critics debating the justification of its central suicide motif. Biswas brings out the play's enduring impact on Indian theatre.

Dr. Bidisha Munshi analyzes Utpal Dutt's *Hunting the Sun* through a Marxist and Brechtian lens, exploring themes of intellectual repression and caste-based oppression. Set in the Gupta period, the play follows Buddhist monk Kalhan's resistance against Emperor Samudragupta, symbolizing the struggle for intellectual freedom. Dutt critiques the use of religious orthodoxy to sustain political power, drawing parallels with modern authoritarian regimes. His Brechtian techniques—alienation, didactic dialogue, and historical reimagination—challenge audiences to critically engage with power structures. Munshi highlights how the play remains relevant in contemporary discourses on class struggle and social justice.

Dr. Arnab Chatterjee explores Elizabeth Inchbald's *The Mogul Tale* (1784), a satirical farce critiquing British colonialism in India. Inchbald challenges Orientalist stereotypes and the dominant colonial narrative by subverting power dynamics between Britain and India. The play, written during the Enlightenment, disrupts the notion that British literature of the era was inherently complicit in colonial expansion. Through a feminist and postcolonial lens, the paper argues that Inchbald's work provides an

alternative discourse that problematizes colonial power and gender roles. Chatterjee contributes to the rediscovery of women playwrights who engaged in anti-colonial critique.

Ms. Nivedita Karmakar gives a compelling historical and cultural critique of blackface minstrelsy and its modern manifestation as “digital blackface.” Karmakar effectively traces blackface’s origins in 19th-century American entertainment, highlighting how it caricatured Black people and reinforced racist stereotypes. It shows how memes, GIFs, and social media practices mimic the same portrayals. Particularly powerful is the connection drawn between cultural appropriation and systemic racism in online spaces. Karmakar comments on how past injustices persist in contemporary culture through digital media.

Sangeeta Mondal & Probal Roy Chowdhury look at the representation of refugee women in Satyajit Ray’s *Mahanagar* and Ritwik Ghatak’s *Meghe Dhaka Tara*. Partition-induced displacement forced women into the workforce, challenging traditional gender roles. *Meghe Dhaka Tara* portrays the sacrifices of a refugee woman who becomes the sole breadwinner, while *Mahanagar* explores patriarchal anxieties about women’s changing roles in urban spaces. The study highlights the paradox of women’s empowerment—economic independence did not always translate into personal freedom. The films reflect the intersection of gender, displacement, and survival. Mondal and Chowdhury show how the films illustrate how partition reshaped Bengali women’s identities in postcolonial India.

Gennia Nuh explores how *Silence*, a play adapted from *Partition Voices* by Kavita Puri, reconnects the British South Asian diaspora with the trauma of Partition (1947). It examines theatre as a medium of postmemory and healing, Britain’s historical amnesia, and how performance challenges colonial erasure by fostering historical reckoning and intergenerational dialogue through storytelling.”

Meenakshy JS and Dr. Shibani C Aich take up *Tholpavakoothu*, Kerala’s traditional shadow puppetry, detailing its history, techniques, and cultural significance. Originating in the ninth century, this ritualistic performance is dedicated to the goddess Bhadrakali and often enacts

stories from the Kamba Ramayana. The paper examines puppet-making techniques, performative elements, and evolving theatrical adaptations. It also explores gender representation and performativity in *Tholpavakoothu*, analyzing how identity is constructed through shadow play. Aich argues that Tholpavakoothu remains a vital part of Kerala's cultural heritage while adapting to contemporary performance spaces.

Debdatta Mitra analyses Jean Genet's *The Maids* focusing on the symbolic and performative function of mirrors. The play, inspired by the real-life Papin sisters, examines themes of power, identity, and servitude. Mirrors act as metaphors for self-reflection and the fractured identities of Solange and Claire as they impersonate their employer, Madame. Genet uses mirrors to challenge the audience's perception of reality and performance, reinforcing the fluidity of identity. Mitra argues that mirrors amplify psychological tension, highlighting the characters' struggle between submission and rebellion within their roles as both servants and would-be masters.

Sanchita Dutta looks at the evolution of Byomkesh Bakshi adaptations from 1967 to 2024, tracing how the character reflects the shifting identity of Bengal's bhadralok. Initially depicted as a rationalist detective, Byomkesh's cinematic representations have transitioned from an intellectual aristocrat to a investigator, catering to modern audiences. The study contextualizes Byomkesh within postcolonial Bengal's cultural anxieties, particularly the erosion of traditional bhadralok values. Dutta concludes that contemporary adaptations embrace psychological depth and fast-paced storytelling, reflecting changing audience expectations and the transformation of Bengali intellectual identity in a globalized world.

Anshuman and Nikhilesh Yadav critique Bollywood's portrayal of transgender identities, exposing transphobia and the reinforcement of harmful stereotypes. It explores how mainstream cinema marginalizes transgender characters through mockery, fear, and misrepresentation, often reducing them to comic relief or villains. The research traces transphobia to colonial laws and societal biases, analyzing Bollywood's failure to provide authentic narratives. These films misrepresent

transgressors. The authors argue that cinema must move beyond token representation toward nuanced, dignified portrayals.

Mohammed Rafiq Hossain & Dr. Charu Yadav examines the critical role of lighting in theatre, analyzing its impact on mood, atmosphere, and audience engagement. Light is described as the “eye of theatre,” guiding audience perception, enhancing emotional depth, and creating dramatic effects. The paper explores historical lighting techniques, from natural sunlight in ancient Greek theatre to modern technological advancements. Lighting design shapes stage performances by directing focus and reinforcing thematic elements. Hossain and Yadav underscore the importance of lighting in visual storytelling and theatrical aesthetics.

Ms. Anju & Prof. (Dr.) Amrita explore the adaptation of Harinder Sikka’s novel *Calling Sehmat* into the film *Raazi*, analyzing the transformation of literary narrative into cinematic storytelling. Using Linda Hutcheon’s adaptation theory, the study examines how the espionage thriller is visually and thematically reinterpreted for the screen. It highlights creative liberties taken by the film, including changes in character depth, pacing, and dramatic tension. The research discusses the challenges of adaptation, particularly in translating Sehmat’s psychological struggles from text to film. The authors think that *Raazi* successfully conveys the novel’s essence while adding cinematic urgency.

P. Praseeba and R. C. Sheila Royappa analyse how Chinua Achebe employs theatrical techniques in *Things Fall Apart*, *Arrow of God*, and *No Longer at Ease* to dramatize linguistic and cultural identity in postcolonial Africa. Through oral storytelling, proverbs, and dramatic dialogue, Achebe mirrors African performance traditions while highlighting tensions between indigenous and colonial languages. The study examines how theatrical elements, such as monologues and symbolic gestures, reinforce themes of resistance and adaptation. Praseeba and Royappa conclude that Achebe’s fiction brings out the performative nature of identity and the resilience of African cultural heritage.

S. Ambadi Narayanan and Dr. P V Ramanathan focuses Jon Fosse’s works, *Melancholy I-II* and *Someone is Going to Come*, through the lens of post-dramatic theatre. Fosse’s minimalist language, fragmented

narrative, and use of silence challenge traditional storytelling, emphasizing emotional experience over structured plot. His plays deconstruct time and space, creating existential tension through ambiguity and absence. Fosse liberates performance from the written text, transforming theatre into an immersive, interpretive experience. By rejecting conventional character arcs, Fosse's works embody post-dramatic principles. According to these authors, these works shift the audience's focus to atmosphere, perception, and psychological introspection.

Dr. Shamsad Nahar discusses how Shakespeare's themes, characters, and narratives have permeated global folk traditions. His plays have inspired folk ballads, myths, and oral storytelling across cultures, from India's Jatra to Japan's Kabuki. Folk adaptations of *Macbeth*, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Hamlet* incorporate indigenous motifs, reinforcing Shakespeare's universal appeal. The paper examines how folk theatre, like Bengali Jatra and Indonesian Wayang Kulit, integrates Shakespearean elements while reshaping them to fit local contexts. Nahar highlights the Bard of Avon's enduring legacy in cross-cultural storytelling.

Dr. P. Anusooya analyses how Girish Karnad's play *Nagamandala* deconstructs patriarchy to empower women. At beginning of the play the protagonist Rani is a typical submissive wife shut up in the house without any freedom. But the mythical Naga comes to her and they begin an affair. Folklore is utilised to give back Rani her agency as a human being. She turns tradition into site of resistance and transforms herself. Anusooya argues that the play demonstrates that tradition can also be an agent of feminist empowerment.

Dr. Monikinkini Basu analyzes how Hindi films were made and distributed in Kolkata from 2016-2023. She begins by discussing the concept of branding films to make a profit. She conducted a survey among the cinema halls in Kolkata during that period. The reception of Hindi films varies but local films do not pose much of a challenge. OTT films have also changed audience taste to online viewership. Basu feels that in today's competitive environment content has been sacrificed and marketing and distribution depends no longer on content but the response it gets at various levels.

Dr. Gargi Bhattacharya explores Akira Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood* as a culturally transformative adaptation of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. The article appreciates Kurosawa's approach of not merely translating the original text, but reimagining it within a Japanese socio-cultural framework through the lens of Noh theatre. It delves into how the syuzhet (plot) rather than fabula (story) shapes the narrative, offering a deeper philosophical critique of ambition and fate. The analysis of the ghostly aesthetic, visual poetry, and Kurosawa's abandonment of Shakespeare's language in favor of cinematic symbolism underscores the film's success in creating a cross-cultural bridge. Bhattacharya demonstrates global adaptability of Shakespeare.

The last article of this Volume by **Mousumi Singha & Mithun Datta** shed light on Madhusudan Dutta's overlooked yet foundational contributions to Bengali theatre. The author documents Dutta's transformation from poet to dramatist, his close engagement with the Bengali stage from 1858 until his death in 1873, and his role in modernizing Bengali drama through innovations in staging, female representation, and dramaturgy. His advocacy for casting real women in female roles and his influence on theatrical realism are particularly notable. Datta restores another Dutta's Dutta's place as a visionary who redefined Bengali theatre's form and content.

Happy Reading

Editors

**The Power of Scotland':
Macbeth (an undoing) and *Dunsinane***

Sheila T. Cavanagh

Abstract:

Macbeth remains a popular play, often being performed on stages around the world. It also regularly appears in widely diverse adapted formats. The two recent plays under discussion here emphasize the role of Lady Macbeth, expanding upon the early modern dramatic character, one through an imagined sequel to the play, the other through a rewritten version of Shakespeare's text that includes familiar dialogue from *Macbeth* and often startling modernized additions. David Greig's *Dunsinane* premiered in 2010. Zinnie Harris' *Macbeth (an undoing)* was first performed in 2023. These two plays take distinctive approaches to their re-imaginings of Lady Macbeth, but each brings renewed attention to some of the central cruxes of *Macbeth*, even though these revisions of the narrative venture widely away from the scope of Shakespeare's drama.

Keywords: Macbeth, Scottish History, Sequel, Reimaginings, Performance.

Macbeth remains a popular play, often being performed on stages around the world. It also regularly appears in widely diverse adapted formats, including plays and films such as the Indian *Maqbool*, the *Simpsons*-inspired *MacHomer*, and the fast-food restaurant movie *Scotland, PA*.¹ Some of these adaptations aim for comedy, while others focus on regional variations or other retellings of Shakespeare's tragedy. The two recent plays under discussion here emphasize the role of Lady Macbeth, expanding upon the early modern dramatic character, one

through an imagined sequel to the play, the other through a rewritten version of Shakespeare's text that includes familiar dialogue from *Macbeth* and often startling modernized additions, such as profane language. David Greig's *Dunsinane* premiered in 2010 at London's Hampstead Theatre in a production by the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC). Zinnie Harris' *Macbeth (an undoing)* was first performed at the Royal Lyceum Theatre, Edinburgh in February, 2023 (returning there in 2024), then toured to the Rose Theatre, Kingston, UK and to the Theatre for a New Audience in New York, both in 2024. These two plays take distinctive approaches to their re-imaginings of Lady Macbeth, but each brings renewed attention to some of the central cruxes of *Macbeth*, even though these revisions of the narrative venture widely away from the scope of Shakespeare's drama.

Lady Macbeth appearing in a sequel to *Macbeth* may surprise audience members or readers of Greig's work who are familiar with Shakespeare's play, but neither of these current playwrights feel constrained by the purported "facts" of the original they draw from. Indeed, while Lady Macbeth's demise is announced in Act Five, Scene Two: "The queen, my lord, is dead,"² there is certainly room for a death that is only reported, not witnessed, to be transformed in a text not claiming to align perfectly with the familiar Shakespearean drama. Greig, in fact, who draws heavily from sources associated with the historic King Macbeth (or Macbeatha), provides Lady Macbeth with a name, Gruach, derived from the historical record,³ and indicates that she has a living son, fathered by her previous husband before that spouse was murdered by Macbeth.⁴ Such changes help make her continued survival fit within the fictional space presented by *Dunsinane*. Notably, in *Macbeth (an undoing)*, Harris similarly gives Lady Macduff a name—Isobel. Presumably, each writer thus endeavors to expand these women's identities beyond their husband's patronymics in dramas that frequently emphasize female agency. Greig also claims to have been far more interested in exploring Scottish history in his work rather than focusing on particular details from *Macbeth*.⁵ As a result, his play provides audiences with some increased knowledge about the historical Macbeth, although distortions of this information also appear. He also emphasizes the cultural

distinctions between English and Scottish characters linguistically. Accordingly, prior to the start of the play, he notes that:

Lines spoken by soldiers and archers of the English army are prefixed by a long dash—

[Dialogue in square brackets is spoken in Gaelic].⁶

Shakespeare, of course, drew largely from *Holinshed's Chronicles* and frequently provided inaccurate accounts of Scottish history. Allusions to historic figures and incidents thus seem relevant to each of these plays, but do not overwhelm the dramatic arcs associated with any of them.

Greig provides Gruach with a central role in *Dunsinane*, but also presents a wide range of characters familiar from the play, such as the English general Siward and others, while also including a variety of soldiers and a briefly pivotal figure known as the “Hen Girl,” who do not appear in *Macbeth*. Like Verdi’s opera *Macbeth*, therefore, Greig’s play draws attention to the people in Scotland beyond royalty and nobility who are affected by the chaos created by those jockeying for position, power, and control. *Dunsinane* also replicates the level of bloodshed found in *Macbeth*, with both soldiers and others engaging in murderous activity throughout the play. In one exchange, for example, the soldiers (and stage directions) refer openly to their focus upon brutal killing:

They kill the wounded man.

—What you staring at?

Clean this up,

Clean this up and get back to butchering.

*The Soldiers clear away the body.*⁷

Thus, while the end of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* signals a shift in Scottish leadership, nothing in *Dunsinane* indicates that peace follows or is in the offing.

Gruach plays a significant and scheming role throughout the course of this drama, often capitalizing upon common perceptions that she is

a witch (who perhaps eats babies),⁸ but predominantly emphasizing her claim that she remains the Queen of Scotland, even after the death of Macbeth. She offers her hand in marriage to men, such as Siward, signaling an alliance she asserts would propel her marriage partner onto the throne as her consort:

I am not a witch but I am Queen of Scotland,
And if you marry me,
You can be king.⁹

While Siward and Gruach never marry each other, they are already lovers at the time of Lady Macbeth's proposal and their relationship remains key to the narrative until the final moments of the play. Given Siward's important military position in *Macbeth* and beyond, Gruach's efforts to consolidate and strengthen her potential power by aligning herself with this significant martial figure illustrates her ongoing commitment to linking romantic and political relationships in an effort to put herself in the most invulnerable position possible. Through a notable shift, Siward reinforces the wisdom in her endeavors by proposing that Malcolm marry her to solidify his rule:

In the last months I've travelled to every part of the country
and I've talked to you.

I know there are those who cannot accept the Queen's son
as king. I know there are those who can never accept Malcolm
as king.

So England proposes a marriage.

Let the Queen marry Malcolm.

Let the Queen's son be Malcolm's heir.

Let the two great houses of Scotland be united.¹⁰

By the end of the play, none of these marriages have occurred, but they demonstrate that neither Lady Macbeth or Gruach can ultimately succeed without acknowledging the cultural presuppositions associated with female expectations regarding marriage and procreation. Gruach

remains ready to substitute different men as her spouse and successive children to be put forward as heirs to the throne, but although she proclaims that “I was never not Queen,”¹¹ her actions indicate that she remains aware that her position as Queen cannot be secure outside of her seeming willingness to conform with societal norms regarding women’s roles. While she can bend the implicit rules by replacing one child with another in this era preceding DNA testing, she is unlikely to rule successfully in her own stead without a husband and/or a son by her side. While many of her opponents accordingly attempt to locate and kill Gruach’s son, moreover, Malcolm recognizes that such deaths cannot be proven and that Gruach retains control in this arena, even when Siward insists that the boy is dead:

I think it’s more likely that by killing this boy you have given him eternal life.

He will come back. He’ll be seen in Orkney, or in some hall in Norway, he’ll come back from slavery in Ireland, or be found on the islands. As long as I’m on the throne, the Queen’s son will haunt me until one day death takes me and even if I die alone in my bed there will be people who will say—the Queen’s son did it.

Scotland does not accept his death.¹²

At the end of the play, Siward appears to accept defeat and disappear into the snow, while Gruach not only remains alive, but claims the final word of dialogue in the play: “Go.”¹³ There is no indication that peace will ever result in the world presented in this drama. Instead, the play ends with the stage direction indicating that “then there is only white,”¹⁴ after Gruach has made her final vow to Siward:

When you’re back in your empty castle, Siward, and one of mine is on the throne again in Dunsinane, I’ll send parties of men raiding into your beloved Northumberland to take cattle and women and burn villages and kill your knights.

For as long as I reign I’ll torment you and when I die I’ll leave instructions in my will to every Scottish Queen that

comes after me to tell her King to take up arms and torment England again and again and again until the end of time.¹⁵

Just as the Lady Macbeth who dies near the end of Shakespeare's play lives again in *Dunsinane*, therefore, Gruach intends to ensure that her own death will not stop her involvement in the future of Scotland's war with England. Siward's disappearance from the text indicates that she has won:

Siward turns and walks away.

He walks into the snow.

*He disappears.*¹⁶

Just as Gruach continues to speak to writers such as David Greig through historical records, therefore, Greig suggests that words shared through stories or wills can hold similar power across time and that death can blur in such narratives, leaving conflicts unsettled and future histories in thrall to figures and actions from the past. Recalling the ending of Roman Polanski's film of *Macbeth*, where Malcolm arrives at the witches' cave upon ascending to the throne,¹⁷ the conclusion of *Dunsinane* suggests that cycles can continue long after those who first put them into action have departed.

Zinnie Harris also places considerable authority into her characterization of Lady Macbeth in *Macbeth (the undoing)*; the events of this play correlate chronologically with the narrative of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, although Harris incorporates modern dialogue into her drama and shifts key plot points to different characters than those who experienced them in the early modern version of the text. Harris has reconceptualized a number of classic plays, including another early modern drama, *The Duchess of Malfi*, which is being revived in London this year as *The Duchess*, with recent *Dr. Who* actor Jodie Whittaker in the title role.¹⁸ Like Greig, Harris takes advantage of such reimaginings partly to facilitate an increased level of agency exhibited by female characters whose initial representations often appear to be constrained by conventions in early drama.

In an essay accompanying the published version of *Macbeth (the undoing)*, Dan Rebellato, Professor of Contemporary Theatre at Royal Holloway, University of London, notes the lengthy history of critical and performative speculation surrounding the question of Lady Macbeth's possible children.¹⁹ While acknowledging that some famous critics, such as L.C. Knights, thought such questioning was "useless," Rebellato believes that "actors and directors (and writers) might usefully—and reasonably—use their imaginations to fill in the gaps."²⁰ He also notes that the play is "packed with children" who "proliferate metaphorically."²¹ Unlike Greig, however, who provides Gruach with the will (and means) to make her supposed heir[s] "proliferate" both metaphorically and apparently in reality, Harris creates a Lady Macbeth who has lost a number of children and who plans to raise the Macduff's child (who may be fathered by Banquo) after Lady Macbeth murders her cousin/sister Lady Macduff:

Lady Macbeth: I said why has the Macduff infant not been brought to me?

Ross: It was as you asked for it.

Lady Macbeth: I asked that it was brought to me. I would raise it.

Ross: No, both dead. Laid together in the same box.

Lady Macbeth: That is not as I asked for it—he was to be ours—here our heir.²²

Lady Macbeth's plan to appropriate the Macduff child fails, but she also faces increasing scrutiny about the death of her own children. Isobel (Lady Macduff) asks, for example, why she should bring her child to Lady Macbeth, since she would then likely "hear that he died in your arms like all of yours."²³ Soon afterwards, Macbeth confronts his wife, proclaiming that "they say you are a witch," and "They ask me questions—when came your wife like this, how is it her children do not live?"²⁴ Lady Macbeth is initially startled by her husband's questions, then recoils, exclaiming "So I am reduced to my infertility after all. Even by you. I thought I loved you."²⁵ This rift leads to Lady Macbeth's

murder of her husband,²⁶ although this takes place long after the pair have swapped roles in the play, regularly taking on the actions and dialogue that Shakespeare attributes to each other's partner. While the Lady Macbeth figure in Greig's play outlives her early modern predecessor, the same character in *Macbeth (the undoing)* often, though not consistently, takes on her husband's part, while he descends into the sleepwalking and madness generally associated with Lady Macbeth. After she kills Macbeth, for example, Lady Macbeth announces that "He should have died hereafter," words spoken by Macbeth when he hears his wife has died in Shakespeare's play. She then continues with Macbeth's famous "tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow" speech.²⁷ Shortly, Macduff arrives and kills her, after which she returns as a ghost with patchy recollections about the life that preceded her. When a "Bloody Soldier" reports that Macbeth's wife has died, she replies "His wife? Do I know her?" not long after she has looked at the royal castle, announcing "I feel like perhaps I knew it once."²⁸ According to the Bloody Soldier, there is scant narrative remaining about the murdered queen: "All that is told about her is that she wept at the end."²⁹

Harris and Greig write quite different revisions of *Macbeth*, but they each investigate themes and concepts that stand at the heart of Shakespeare's text. The unanswerable questions about Lady Macbeth's experiences with motherhood, for example, figure prominently in literary and dramatic explorations of the early modern play. Examinations of witchcraft, madness, loyalty, and murder also emerge both in the original drama and in these reconfigured versions. Rebellato's remarks about Harris' play can be applied to *Dunsinane* also, with little alteration:

Zinnie Harris has diverted the course of *Macbeth*, pulling it apart and reconstructing it—we might say 'undoing' it and re-'doing it'—such that Shakespeare's and Harris's plays are both wildly different and uncannily similar.³⁰

As Rebellato notes about Harris and Shakespeare, all of these plays diverge and converge in striking ways. They illustrate the variations introduced by distinctive forms of narrativity and theatricality. The stories told, for example, shift as different narrators present their own versions

of reality. In Harris's play, moreover, theatre staff occasionally appear on stage and divert the course of action, making it impossible to ignore that this is a story being performed. These dramas also interrogate how gender norms can both construct and dismantle individual actions, even as they demonstrate how elusive norms of any kind can be in such environments. Different staged versions of *Macbeth*, for instance, either include physical representations of Macbeth's dagger and Banquo's ghost—or not. The blood confounding Lady Macbeth's sleep in Act Five, Scene One: "Out, damned Spot"³¹ presumably is not presented on stage, but it is difficult to determine whether the blood confronted by Lady Macbeth in *Macbeth (the undoing)* is "real," although it is clearly stage blood. In this scene, moreover, other characters are addressing the Queen as though she were the King. When Lady Macbeth is worrying about the blood on her dress, for example, but also asks about the knocking she hears, Lennox responds that "No one, Sir" is knocking.³² In *Dunsinane*, moreover, characters' actions often defy clear understanding, while in *Macbeth*, we do not always know definitively which lines were written by Shakespeare or how accurately the First Folio text of 1623 reflects the text that was performed during the playwright's lifetime. *Macbeth* is a slippery play both on the page and in production. *Dunsinane* and *Macbeth (the undoing)*, moreover, replicate such uncertainties while increasing our attention to some of the elements included in the original text (such as Lady Macbeth's agency) that appear to warrant further attention in modern circumstances. In England and the United States, *Macbeth* has recently received two major productions, starring prominent actors Ralph Fiennes and David Tennant as the eponymous king and Indira Varma and Cush Jumbo as their respective queens.³³ The fairly concurrent timing of Greig's and Harris's plays suggest that interest in the imagined back stories of this narrative is also prevalent among many audiences. In conversation with each other, these plays tell us a great deal about commonalities and changes in perspectives about issues that remain current despite the intervening centuries separating *Macbeth* from these modern reinterpretations.

Endnotes

1. *Maqbool*, directed by Vishal Bhardwaj, 2003. Rick Miller, *MacHomer*, performed from 1995-2012. *Scotland, PA*, directed by Billy Morrissette, 2001.
2. William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, edited by Max Webster, London: Nick Hern Books, p. 78.
3. <https://www.shakespearetheatre.org/watch-listen/an-interview-with-dunsinane-playwright-david-greig/>.
4. Greig is not the only writer to include this historic figure in modern drama or fiction. She appears, for instance, in Gordon Bottomley's 1921 verse drama *Gruach*; Dorothy Dunnett's 1982 novel *King Hereafter*; Susan Fraser King's 1982 *Lady Macbeth*, and a variety of other texts.
5. <https://www.shakespearetheatre.org/watch-listen/an-interview-with-dunsinane-playwright-david-greig/>.
6. David Greig, *Dunsinane*, n.p.
7. Greig, *Dunsinane*, p. 59.
8. Greig, *Dunsinane*, p. 60.
9. Greig, *Dunsinane*, p. 70.
10. Greig, *Dunsinane*, p. 83.
11. Greig, *Dunsinane*, p. 84.
12. Greig, *Dunsinane*, p. 125.
13. Greig, *Dunsinane*, p. 138.
14. Greig, *Dunsinane*, p. 138.
15. Greig, *Dunsinane*, p. 136.
16. Greig, *Dunsinane*, p. 138.
17. *Macbeth*, directed by Roman Polanski, 1971.
18. <https://trafalgartheatre.com/shows/the-duchess/>.
19. Dan Rebillato, "What's Done is Done," in Zinnie Harris, *Macbeth (the undoing)*, London: Faber and Faber, pp. 127-134.

20. Rebillato, "What's Done," p. 131.
21. Rebillato, "What's Done," p. 132.
22. Zinnie Harris, *Macbeth (the undoing)*, London: Faber and Faber, p. 107.
23. Harris, *Macbeth (the undoing)*, p. 98.
24. Harris, *Macbeth (the undoing)*, p. 116.
25. Harris, *Macbeth (the undoing)*, p. 118.
26. Harris, *Macbeth (the undoing)*, p. 120.
27. Harris, *Macbeth (the undoing)*, p. 120.
28. Harris, *Macbeth (the undoing)*, p. 124.
29. Harris, *Macbeth (the undoing)*, p. 124.
30. Rebillato, "What's Done," p. 127.
31. William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, edited by Max Webster, London: Nick Hern Books, p. 71.
32. Harris, *Macbeth (the undoing)*, p. 106.
33. <https://www.shakespearetheatre.org/events/macbeth-23-24/> and <https://www.haroldpintertheatre.co.uk/shows/macbeth>.

Performing Arts: An Academic Review on Manipuri Theatre

Irom Gambhir Singh

Abstract

Academic writing and critical review writing are essential skills in the realm of performing arts, serving as conduits for the dissemination of knowledge, critique, and scholarly discourse. This article explores the nuances of academic writing and critical review writing within the context of performing arts, emphasizing their roles, methodologies, and significance. By examining the interplay between theory and practice, this article aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how these writing forms contribute to the academic and practical appreciation of performing arts. Writing an academic review of a theatrical performance involves a thorough analysis of the production's artistic elements, cultural significance, and the theoretical frameworks that inform its narrative. By combining critique with scholarly inquiry, the reviewer places the performance in its broader cultural, historical, and political contexts. In this paper, *Mythical Surrender*, written by Buddha Chingtham, serves as a case study to explore how a review of a performing arts production is structured. The review also incorporates a comparative account of *Lai-Haraoba*, the origin of Manipuri theatre, to underscore the cultural roots and artistic innovations in Chingtham's play.

Keywords: academic writing, critical review writing, performing arts, *Lai-Haraoba*

Introduction and Contextualization

Performing arts, encompassing disciplines such as theatre, dance, music, and opera, are inherently experiential and ephemeral. The transitory

nature of live performances necessitates a robust framework for documentation, analysis, and critique. Academic writing and critical review writing serve as vital tools in this endeavor, enabling scholars, practitioners, and critics to engage with performing arts in a structured and meaningful manner.

This article delineates the characteristics of academic writing and critical review writing, their methodologies, and their application in the performing arts. It also highlights the symbiotic relationship between these writing forms and the performing arts, illustrating how they collectively enhance the understanding and appreciation of artistic endeavors.

Academic Writing in Performing Arts: Definition and Characteristics

Academic writing in performing arts is a scholarly activity that involves the systematic investigation of artistic practices, theories, and histories. It is characterized by its formal tone, structured argumentation, and reliance on evidence-based research. The primary objective of academic writing is to contribute to the body of knowledge within the field, fostering a deeper understanding of performing arts through critical analysis and theoretical exploration.

Methodologies

- 1. Theoretical Frameworks:** Academic writing often employs theoretical frameworks to analyze performing arts. These frameworks may include semiotics, phenomenology, post-structuralism, and cultural studies, among others. By applying these theories, scholars can interpret performances within broader cultural, social, and historical contexts.
- 2. Historical Analysis:** Historical research is a cornerstone of academic writing in performing arts. It involves the examination of primary and secondary sources to trace the evolution of artistic practices, movements, and genres. This methodology provides insights into the historical significance and cultural impact of performances.

- 3. Ethnographic Research:** Ethnography, involving participant observation and interviews, is another methodology used in academic writing. It allows researchers to explore the lived experiences of performers and audiences, offering a nuanced understanding of the social dynamics within performing arts.
- 4. Performance Analysis:** Performance analysis focuses on the detailed examination of specific performances. It involves the study of elements such as *mise-en-scène*, choreography, sound design, and audience reception. This methodology enables scholars to dissect the artistic choices and their implications.

Significance

Academic writing in performing arts plays a crucial role in preserving and interpreting artistic heritage. It provides a platform for the dissemination of research findings, fostering intellectual discourse and advancing the field. Moreover, it bridges the gap between theory and practice, offering practitioners valuable insights that can inform their artistic endeavors.

Critical Review Writing in Performing Arts: Definition and Characteristics

Critical review writing in performing arts involves the evaluation and critique of performances, productions, and artistic works. It is characterized by its subjective yet informed perspective, aiming to provide an assessment of the artistic merits and shortcomings of a performance. Critical reviews serve as a medium for dialogue between artists and audiences, offering constructive feedback and fostering a deeper appreciation of the arts.

Methodologies

- 1. Descriptive Analysis:** Critical reviews often begin with a descriptive analysis of the performance, detailing the plot, characters, setting, and artistic elements. This provides readers with a comprehensive understanding of the performance context.
- 2. Interpretative Critique:** The interpretative critique involves the

reviewer's subjective interpretation of the performance. It explores themes, symbolism, and artistic intentions, offering insights into the deeper meanings and messages conveyed by the performance.

3. **Evaluative Judgment:** Evaluative judgment is the core of critical review writing. It involves the assessment of the performance's artistic quality, considering factors such as acting, direction, choreography, and technical execution. The reviewer provides a balanced critique, highlighting both strengths and weaknesses.
4. **Contextualization:** Contextualization places the performance within a broader cultural, social, and historical framework. It examines how the performance reflects or challenges prevailing norms and values, contributing to a more nuanced critique.

Significance

Critical review writing is instrumental in shaping public perception and discourse around performing arts. It provides audiences with informed perspectives, guiding their engagement with artistic works. For artists, critical reviews offer valuable feedback that can inform their creative processes and artistic development. Additionally, critical reviews contribute to the historical record, documenting the evolution of performing arts over time.

Academic Writing and Critical Review Writing: Complementary Roles

Academic writing and critical review writing, while distinct in their objectives and methodologies, are complementary in their roles within the performing arts. Academic writing provides the theoretical and historical foundation that informs critical reviews, while critical reviews offer practical insights that can enrich academic research. Together, they create a dynamic interplay that enhances the understanding and appreciation of performing arts.

Case Studies

1. **Brechtian Theatre:** Academic writing on Bertolt Brecht's epic theatre has provided a theoretical framework for analyzing his

works. Critical reviews of Brechtian productions often draw on these academic insights, applying them to evaluate contemporary performances. This interplay enriches both the scholarly discourse and the practical critique of Brechtian theatre.

2. **Contemporary Dance:** Academic research on contemporary dance explores its evolution, techniques, and cultural significance. Critical reviews of contemporary dance performances utilize this research to contextualize and critique the artistic choices of choreographers and dancers. This synergy between academic writing and critical reviews fosters a deeper engagement with contemporary dance.

Challenges and Opportunities

The interplay between academic writing and critical review writing is not without challenges. The subjective nature of critical reviews can sometimes clash with the objective rigor of academic writing. However, this tension also presents opportunities for dialogue and collaboration, encouraging scholars and critics to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

An academic review begins with an introduction that sets the stage for the analysis. Here, it is needed to provide basic information about the play and its production, as well as its cultural and historical significance.

For *Mythical Surrender* (2011), written by Buddha Chingtham and directed by Ningthouja Deepak, this context includes:

- **Title:** *Mythical Surrender*
- **Playwright:** Buddha Chingtham
- **Director:** Ningthouja Deepak
- **Theatre Group:** NT Theatre (Imphal-based group)
- **Performance Date:** January 17, 2011
- **Venue:** Shri Ram Centre for Arts and Culture, New Delhi, as part

of the 14th Bharat Rang Mahotsav, the National School of Drama's (NSD) annual festival.

The review contextualizes the play within its broader thematic focus on **Indian nationalism** and **regional autonomy**. It explores how the play critiques the domination of the northeastern states of India by the political and cultural centers of the country, especially in the context of **Manipur** and its struggle for identity.

In addition to addressing these themes, the review incorporates a **comparative analysis of *Lai-Haraoba***, a traditional form of Manipuri theatre, which serves as the cultural foundation for the play. *Lai-Haraoba*, a sacred ritual and performance tradition, offers insights into the distinctive aesthetic and cultural expressions embedded in Manipuri theatre.

Summarizing the Plot and Themes

A concise plot summary gives the reader an understanding of the narrative, followed by an exploration of the play's themes. *Mythical Surrender* revolves around the suffering of the people in northeastern India, especially **Manipur**, under the constant threat of counter-insurgency forces. Through a combination of mythology and contemporary political realities, the play highlights the exploitation of northeastern communities by the North Indian political center.

Key themes explored in the play include:

- **Nationalism and Identity:** The play critiques the centralization of Indian nationalism, which marginalizes regional cultures and identities.
- **Oppression and Resistance:** Through the lens of myth, the play addresses the tension between the **center** (North India) and the **periphery** (the northeastern states), where the exercise of power by the central government results in the suffering of the people in these regions.
- **Mythology and Power:** The play utilizes ancient Manipuri myths to expose the political realities of today, showing how cultural

traditions can be both a means of resistance and a way to reflect on contemporary struggles.

Critical Analysis of the Performance

The review critically evaluates several key aspects of the production.

- **Direction and Concept:** Director Ningthouja Deepak's concept is essential to the play's success. His vision merges **traditional Manipuri forms** with modern political commentary. The director's use of **mythological storytelling** alongside contemporary issues serves as an innovative technique that enhances the thematic depth of the play. The seamless blending of myth and reality challenges the audience's understanding of identity and resistance in a modern context. The **aesthetic roots** in *Lai-Haraoba*—a ritualistic form that merges dance, music, and storytelling—are evident in the physicality and visual design of the performance.
- **Acting and Performances:** The performances by the cast are deeply emotional, drawing on traditional Manipuri acting styles that focus on **gesture-based communication** and **expressive physicality**. The actors' ability to portray the suffering and resistance of the marginalized people in the play is powerful, and the physicality of the performances, especially in moments of high emotional tension, echoes the performative tradition of *Lai-Haraoba*.
- **Set Design and Lighting:** The minimalist set design is symbolic, using sparse elements that suggest both traditional and contemporary spaces. Lighting plays a key role in differentiating between the **mythical** and **real** worlds, with softer lighting representing the spiritual realm and harsher lighting reflecting the oppressive realities of life in Manipur. This technique enhances the play's narrative of resistance against domination.
- **Costumes and Makeup:** The costumes pay homage to traditional Manipuri dress, adding authenticity to the performances. The use of symbolic colors and styles helps to visually differentiate the various cultural and political forces at play. The intricate makeup

adds a ritualistic element, linking the production to the cultural practices of *Lai-Haraoba*.

- **Music and Sound:** Music, especially traditional Manipuri music, plays a crucial role in creating an emotional and atmospheric backdrop for the play. The music emphasizes the connection between the **mythological past** and the **political present**, enhancing the themes of resistance and power. The incorporation of traditional **dhol** (drums) and **pena** (a stringed instrument) brings depth to the performance, grounding it in the **local culture**.

Theoretical Framework and Cultural Context: *Lai-Haraoba* and Manipuri Theatre

In this section, the review examines the **theoretical frameworks** and **cultural context** that inform the play. The primary cultural foundation of *Mythical Surrender* lies in *Lai-Haraoba*, a traditional Manipuri performance that blends **ritual**, **dance**, **music**, and **storytelling** to communicate religious and cultural narratives.

Lai-Haraoba is not merely a performance but a sacred ritual dedicated to the gods and the **spiritual forces** that govern life. It is a vibrant example of how traditional Manipuri theatre involves the audience in a dynamic and participatory way, with music, dance, and ritual serving as essential components in the storytelling process. The use of **symbolic gestures**, **chanting**, and **movements** helps convey powerful emotional truths about the human condition, providing a direct line of communication with the divine.

When comparing *Lai-Haraoba* with *Mythical Surrender*, we see how Chingtham's play draws on these traditional elements to critique the contemporary socio-political landscape. Just as *Lai-Haraoba* uses mythological storytelling to bring divine power into the present world, *Mythical Surrender* uses mythology as a vehicle to highlight the struggles of the people in Manipur. The **ritualistic** nature of *Lai-Haraoba* also informs the play's **physicality**—the actors' movement, posture, and vocalization echo the **expressive traditions** of *Lai-Haraoba*, underscoring the play's thematic commitment to resistance, identity, and power.

In terms of **hybridity**, *Mythical Surrender* reflects a fusion of **traditional and contemporary elements**. By using *Lai-Haraoba* as a cultural foundation, Chingtham creates a hybrid theatrical form that simultaneously critiques modern **Indian nationalism** while asserting the value of traditional **regional identity**. This hybridization of **myth** and **politics** serves as a powerful critique of the homogenizing forces of central government power in India, making the play both a **cultural preservationist** work and a **political statement**.

Evaluation of Strengths and Weaknesses

● **Strengths:**

- The play's integration of traditional Manipuri performance styles with modern themes is a major strength. The direction, design, and performances all effectively channel the power of *Lai-Haraoba* while commenting on contemporary issues.
- The use of mythological elements is both culturally resonant and politically incisive. By situating the struggles of the northeastern states in a mythic framework, the play opens up a new mode of understanding both ancient and modern struggles.
- The performances are emotionally charged and rooted in Manipuri traditions, creating a deeply immersive experience for the audience.

● **Weaknesses:**

- Some audience members unfamiliar with Manipuri traditions or *Lai-Haraoba* may find the play's hybridization of myth and politics challenging. The performance may require additional cultural context for full appreciation.
- The pacing at times feels uneven, particularly during transitions between mythological and political scenes, which may disrupt the flow of the narrative.

Conclusion: Thematic and Artistic Significance

Mythical Surrender is a significant theatrical work that critiques Indian nationalism, highlighting the struggles of marginalized regions like Manipur through the lens of mythology and political commentary. The play's **artistic achievements** lie in its ability to blend **traditional Manipuri theatre**, particularly *Lai-Haraoba*, with modern political themes, thus producing a hybrid theatrical form that is both culturally rich and politically potent. The review highlights how the play challenges the monolithic nature of Indian nationalism while reinforcing the importance of regional identity. It serves as a powerful case study of how **theatre can be used as both a cultural expression and a tool of resistance** in the contemporary world.

Academic writing and critical review writing are indispensable to the field of performing arts, each contributing unique perspectives and insights. Academic writing provides the theoretical and historical foundation, while critical reviews offer practical evaluations and critiques. Together, they create a comprehensive framework for understanding and appreciating performing arts, fostering a dynamic and informed discourse that enriches both the academic and practical realms.

As the performing arts continue to evolve, the roles of academic writing and critical review writing will remain pivotal. By embracing their complementary nature and addressing the challenges they present, scholars and critics can continue to advance the field, ensuring that the performing arts are both preserved and innovated for future generations.

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Psychic Affliction of Modern Man: Revisiting Ratan Thiyam's *Macbeth*

Pangeijam Sanjeev

Abstract

Ratan Thiyam's one of the most striking productions *Macbeth* is his psychic presentation of timeless universal affliction of ever increasing reckless human desire which bring forth a never-ending violence, disaster and corruption in the world. Everyman has this lust for power in a dream to build a comfort zone in this ever escalating chaos of the modern civilization. This overriding desire to create a comfort, protective zone is the affliction which has infected the mind and psyche of man. *Macbeth* is the name of this affliction which is continuously spreading out uncontrollably in this contemporary world of the so-called advanced civilization. Making way for this affliction, human virtues and values fall by wayside. Images significant of the suggested affliction are abound in the play setting and enacting actions of *Macbeth* by RatanThiyam.

Keywords: Affliction, desire, ambition, modern, tribal

Macbeth which is believed to have been written between 1603 and 1607 by Shakespeare can be said as one of his most heinous and spine chilling powerful tragedies of all time. This tragedy, set in Scotland, dramatizes the psychological traumas and psychic affliction which leads to destruction and doom when evil and horrendous activities are chosen as a means to fulfill the overriding desire and ambition. It is the most potent and shortest Shakespearean tragedy which tells the story of a brave Scottish general who is prophesized to become King of Scotland by three witches. After hearing these prophecies, consumed by over ambition and desire along with the constant instigation and nagging by

his equally ambitious wife, Lady Macbeth, he murders King Duncan and ascends the throne of Scotland by himself. After this, both the husband and wife, wrecked and wretched with guilt and paranoia commit murder, more and more crimes to cover their evil deeds and to protect themselves from enmity and suspicion. The consequent horrific bloodbaths lead Macbeth and Lady Macbeth into arrogance, psychic madness and finally death. This dark tragedy which is commonly believed to be a black curse among many theatre fraternity still attracts a lot of directors and producers around the Globe to adapt it in film, theatre, television and other media.

The Chorus Repertory Theatre founder Director and former Director of National School of Drama, New Delhi, Ratan Thiyam has adapted this tragedy in a very unique indigenous yet universal setting on stage. The theatrical presentation of *Macbeth* by Ratan Thiyam opens on the stage by encapsulating an atmosphere of eerie entanglement among the swaying and crawling wild creepers in a dark forest. In such a supernatural setting of the dark deep forest, the heralding of prophecies by the witches to Macbeth and Banquo with a weird sounding effect has created creepy sense to the audience. Further the stage setting with the blue and greenish light makes the stage into a mystical forest alive with fascinating florals. The tone of the play is all set up among a chilling mysterious atmosphere with unearthly howling sounds. A seemingly unknown fear envelopes the whole theatre. The sight of the greenish colored beguiling octopus-like witches with their wagging tentacles against the dark background with the tradition based eerie music and sound further create a sense of deception and suspicion in the mind of the audience of an upcoming disaster as Shakespearean tragedies often forecast. In his adaptation Thiyam has not defied this Shakespearean signature. The long tentacles of the faceless witches equivocal the madness and arrogance arms of the desire and over ambition which are instilled in men's mind particularly here in Lady Macbeth and Macbeth. This overriding desire and over ambition which brings the affliction begun to crawl all over Lady Macbeth. The letter which Macbeth writes to Lady Macbeth after encountering the witches is presented on the stage by the extraordinarily large and long scroll mat with the creepy

hieroglyphic signs. It makes the audience feel the devilish craft of the infliction infiltrating the whole arena. When this long letter is brought by a servant to her, Lady Macbeth unfurls its entire length with one single toss across the front portion of the stage. Then with engross curiosity and high spirit she reads it and suddenly with growing excitement she picks it up and drapes the whole of it frantically around her shoulder and body as though to delve herself in its contents with frenzied obsession. The pale red spotlight and echoing shrill music in the background when she absorbed herself willfully in this gigantic scroll and gleefully wraps around herself in a frantic way makes all the audience anticipate the harbinger of the indiscriminant infection of the affliction which will corrode her whole body, mind and soul. The gravity of the situation is heightened with such crafty stage direction and lighting. The pale reddish white beam of light illuminated the devilish smile on the face of Lady Macbeth against the dark background while she embraces the large long letter evolves an intense terrifying and pathetic feeling in the mind and sense of the audience.

The theme of overriding desire, over ambition, greed and hunger for power which obviously bring the terrible consequences like bloodshed, damnation and desperate doom envelopes the whole stage throughout the entire production and performances from this moment. The affliction has totally infested Lady Macbeth. It devours her being and the evil it can do is anticipated to unfold as the play proceeds. Uneasiness and desperation begins to churn the audience mind and sense at the thought that the affliction looms nearby to strike Macbeth at the very first opportunity that comes. So Thiyam, to portray this affliction in the psyche of the characters and to create a sense of timelessness and universality transports *Macbeth*, the play to a fictional ancient, indigenous tribal place which is conceptualized by himself. The costume, the attire, the accessories are all seemed to redesign from indigenous tribal roots highlighting the savagery of the infliction. With all these adaption of tribal roots, the great barrenness of the empty stage with dark dim lighting occasionally with red and bluish makes the audience touch the feeling of Shakespearean tragedy which mostly embodies the mystery and darkness. The sound effect with the deep gongs, loud thumping

drums and the shrill echoes of the traditional tribal music which Thiyam brings in the setting, reverberates a mysterious melancholic yet vibrant and brooding uneasiness in the minds of the audience. As the play proceeds the infliction crawls and creeps along with it. This contagious infliction slides then towards Macbeth. The long lengthy letter infested with the infliction rolls out to Macbeth appearing to let his being take it in and envelope by what he has written himself following the witches prophecy. The oversized sword Macbeth held and helpless small doll representing King Duncan lying on the bed in his sleep and the sudden explosion of red with the loud deafening thumping drums which comes like a sudden thunderbolt at the very instant when Macbeth stabs Duncan horrified the whole audience. At the next moment the lights snap off and again when the lights come on it is red spotting only on Duncan's bed which is covered in a flood of red drape. This carefully crafted stage presentation of this moment makes the audience sense the affliction devours the whole of Macbeth- the contemporary man. The affliction of unlimited and unhindered desire for greed of power has infected the whole realm of mankind. This malady has for long been polluting the society in this age. In our modern time many Macbeths who have over ambitious desire for power corrupts and corrupts being without checking leads to catastrophic consequences. This artistically spine chilling stage presentation where Lady Macbeth allures and enchants Macbeth in her horrific and heinous scheme instills and over-whelms the mind of the audience. This automatically triggers a sense of "fear" in the mind which actually is one important factor of Shakespearean tragedy.

The hospital asylum scene with many faceless Macbeths along with the protagonist Macbeth sitting in wheelchair and pushed by white uniformed nurses further petrified the theatre goers. All Macbeths in the wheelchair are wrecked with guilt and paranoia. The protagonist Macbeth surrounded on three sides by the faceless Macbeth break down crying like a child in the center stage as Lady Macbeth on other far end side of the stage keeps washing her hand in a bowl. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth's facial expression shows the mentally disarranged and delirious insanity which has encompassed their psyche and mind. All the while the nurses in the white uniformed standing in semi circle behind Macbeth

scorn and spit charges by pointing their accusing fingers. They like a group of scavenging vulture around its dying prey, blame and attack by hurling disdainful and distaste remarks that Macbeth himself has invited the affliction with his gluttonous greed and desire. The scene setting here is predominantly dim and dull with no energetic movement except for the nurses high pitch scorn and curse against the background blatant noise and commotion of modern menace. Unlike the previous stage enactment done by representing the conglomeration of indigenous tribal setting, this particular scene is set with the contemporary modern world. This scene seems to be out of sync with the rest of scenes. But probably it is the amazing craftsmanship of the director, RatanThiyam to announce and reveal to all that the affliction is deported back from the far bygone time of primitive era to the contemporary modern age. So, actually, the sudden shocking change in setting from the primitive era to modern time rings in the mind of the audience that the affliction has infected our modern world and our time. Further again here, even if Thiyam's adaptation of Shakespeare's tragedy is outrageous, he does not fail to put forth the Shakespearean tragic component "pity" which are to arouse in the mind of the audience. Here it can be highlighted that even in his wildest adaptation of the great tragedy, Thiyam doesnot really stray away from the Great Master's tragic conception. This intrusion of modern scene without any slightest warning is an exemplary presentation of how a tragedy written by a Great Master from 1600s is deported back into the current condition of the modern world through a crafty and creative dramatic performance.

From the opening scene of the adaptation, the great director does not fail to build up the tragic mood and mode. All the settings are predominantly dark and darkness is a prominent motif in his stage presentation of the tragedy. It fuels the gloomy mood that this affliction is in the psyche of the characters and has eroded almost the whole realm of the modern world. There are sometimes burst of positive white light and violent red to enhance the sensory feeling of the audience. Sometimes the nocturnal movement with the eerie sound and sometimes energetic movements with loud thumping drums enhance the stage performance and keep reminding to audiences that the affliction has

long been polluting the society in contemporary times. Without deflecting far from the Shakespearean motive of tragedy, Ratan Thiyam with his amazing stage craftsmanship brings the climax, anti-climax and consolation of his adaptation. He brings the most shocking tragic climax with the well crafted and perfect lighting stage enactment with Duncan's murder scene. This well perfected contrived gravity of the moment makes the audience gasp with shock. It is one of the most masterfully choreographed scenes in the whole adaptation of Ratan Thiyam. Then the scene where the white uniformed nurses of the modern hospital pushing in the wheelchairs the weird bandaged Macbeths who are supposedly infected with the affliction of the overriding desire, ambition and greed for power and wealth highlight the search for a vain remedy to cure the affliction. These infected Macbeths along with the protagonist Macbeth is shown to be frustrated, down and sunken with no taste of life. This is where the anti climax of the adaptation has almost touched the ground. This is what Thiyam's adaptation of the play has been leading to a judicious outcry against the overriding desire and ambition that propagates corruption, violence, madness and maniac which destroy peace, tranquility, human values and humanity. Further, the murder of Macbeth is not shown on the stage in his adaptation rather the remnant of the demolished Macbeth is symbolically represents on the stage as a heap of garbage spotlighting in red. The ending scene is thus concludes with the singing women sweeping away the stinking remains of the demonic Macbeths in the hospital. The piles of the demolished fragments, bandages are thrown away as heaps of garbage. The women with surgery masks and brooms singing and humming the primitive tune emerge on the stage heralding the new hope and treatment for the affliction. In this instance, the stage is again deported to the far off primitive place and time with all traditionally cloned background folk music and requiem. This time shift from primitive era to modern and then back to primitive sanctify the whole complete revolution of the performance. It is the uniqueness of his originality and trademark that recreates telling images which are crafted for the stage from the available primitive, indigenous tribal tradition, custom and crafts. It further artistically conveys in a universal language of dramatic performance that

a fearful plague of mental affliction is spreading unchecked like wildfire in the contemporary modern world due to greed and desire. And it is only through turning into traditions, old way teachings and self realization that can prevent and cure the affliction. It is with his theatrical performance, Ratan Thiyam makes all the audience aware that the monster is lurking inside the man and man has to look inside themselves rather than seeking the relief and comfort zone elsewhere. It is with these notes and proclamations that conclude the play.

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The Russian Approach to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*

Lopamudra Dey

Abstract

Among Shakespeare's works, one of the most popular and loved play in Russia is *Hamlet*. To understand the influence of Shakespeare, an English playwright in Russia, we need to focus on the Russian responses to the drama in the pre revolution (1800- 1917) and post revolution (1917- 2015) period. Shakespeare enjoyed a place of prominence in the 19th century Russian culture and his works underwent multiple translations. Shakespeare was greatly admired by Lenin, who introduced him to the Soviet proletariat as a dramatist, who spoke about the class struggle. Authors like Alexander Griboyedov, Alexander Pushkin and Orset Sovom followed Shakespeare's model in creating a specific national literature founded on the comprehension of national spirit. The debut performance of *Hamlet* on stage was Alexander Sumarokov's production, in 1750. He retained the five major characters of the play and made a happy ending, where Hamlet unites with Ophelia at the end of the play. Ivan Turgenev and Dostoevsky admired *Hamlet* and created their own heroes based on Hamlet's character. Post revolution, Boris Pasternak's translation of *Hamlet* became very popular, which was used by director Grigory Kozintsev to stage the play in 1954. Yuri Lyubimov also used the same translation for a performance in 1971. Pasternak defined the character Hamlet as serious, dedicated, self-sacrificing and a Christ like sufferer. The Russian film director, Gleb Panifelov presented *Hamlet*, in his production in 1986 as a tragi-comedy rather than a tragedy. The most remarkable and sensational production of the play was by Peter Stein in 1998 where Hamlet is in a single combat with the world and with himself in a boxing ring. In the 21st century, director Valery Fokin's version of the play (2010) is noteworthy. It features the

modern Hamlets in their frantic search for truths. The Valery Sarkisov production (2013) presents Hamlet as a young man, trying to answer the simple questions of life.

Keywords: class struggle, representative play, national literature, tragic-comedy, modernistic perspectives, liberal approach.

The Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic commonly known as Soviet Russia was an independent state from 1917-1922. On 24th October, 1917, there was an uprising in Moscow Petrograd area by the Bolshevik Party led by Lenin, primarily known as the 'October Revolution'. Tsar Nicholas II was the ruler and the uprising led to the fall of monarchy. Later the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic was formed from 1922-1991. The Russians formed the largest ethnic group. It was the first Marxist Leninist state in the world. The word soviet was derived from Russian 'sovet'(governing council) and after the revolution , the local government was elected by workers. With the rise of Soviets in Russia, many authors were removed from public libraries because of their history, politics, social values but Shakespeare was more fortunate. Shakespeare enjoyed a place of prominence in 19th century Russian culture and his works underwent multiple translations, though Shakespeare's complete works were not translated until 1841by Nicholai Ketcher. According to Joseph G. Price :

“Karl Marx had extolled Shakespeare as one of the world's geniuses.”

Shakespeare's work was appreciated because of complex moral questions, monarchy or religion. He was read, as, speaking to the class struggle. Lenin and his wife agreed that the Communist government of Russia would need an educated Russian people. Therefore, far from banning Shakespeare, they strived to make his work more available to the working people. So an endeavour was made to make him available to the proletariat along with land and wealth. After Lenin's death in 1924, it is said five million Shakespeare plays were published from 1917- 1939 , not just in Russian but in the twentyeight languages of Soviet Union. There were maximum productions of Shakespeare plays

in this period in Soviet theaters than in the United States and Britain. There were regular meetings, discussions of Shakespeare for artists and academics as well as publishing Shakespeare related texts. Authors like Alexander Pushkin, Alexander Griboyedov, Orset Sovom followed Shakespeare's model in creating a specific national literature founded on the comprehension of national spirit. After the December rising of 1825 and its suppression, Shakespeare's dramas and histories helped to interpret the political tragedy and its participants. As happened under other despotic regimes or times of heavy censorship, people relied on Shakespeare for freedom of expressions. Both, before and after the October uprising, writers who feared their work might be subject to censorship, turned their attention to Shakespeare in discussion or in translation. Tiffany and Conroe More remarks that Shakespeare as an artist was admired by Lenin, Marx and Engels who had been rehabilitated in Soviet Criticism and his plays were used as a screen to hide more radical politics and used as an allegory for portraying contemporary situations.

Among Shakespeare's works the most popular and the best loved in Russia are *Hamlet*, *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet*. In this paper, I am going to concentrate only on *Hamlet*. It was *Hamlet*, that won the deepest sympathy of the Russians. His passivity, his constant reflection, his everlasting pensiveness were identified typically as Russian traits. The works of Russian writers and critics contain frequent references to the play over many decades. Hamlet's everlasting mysterious nature challenges actors, critics, directors, painters, musicians and artists to comment upon or interpret this character. They continue to debate the play's meaning and what came to be known as 'Hamletism' throughout this time starting with the influential critic Vissarion Belinsky. He characterizes Shakespeare's Prince of Denmark in the following way:

“Hamlet's nature is purely inward, contemplative, subjective, born from feeling and thought; they call him from the ideal into the practical world; into the world of action. Naturally, this situation gives rise to a terrible struggle in *Hamlet*, to an inward conflict which forms the very essence of the whole drama.”
(essay 'Hamlet', 1838)

Alexander Sumarokov's version of *Hamlet* published in 1748 and produced in 1750 was the debut performance of Shakespeare on stage in Russia. The play was only Shakespeare's by name. Sumarokov retained five characters of the play (Hamlet, Gertrude, Claudius, Ophelia and Polonius), omitted graveyard scene, play within the play and the duel and made Polonius the murderer of Hamlet's father and Claudius the wooer of Ophelia. He gave the play a happy ending in which Hamlet lives happily ever after with Ophelia as the rightful ruler of Denmark. After attending performances of *Hamlet* in 1837 with the mesmerizing Pavel Mochalov in the lead role, V. Belinsky seized on his own and the audience's reaction to the powerful performance as a hopeful sign that literature could engage the social as well as the emotional sensibilities of the Russian public. According to him Russia had found a national narrative, though it came from outside its borders and his narrative spoke directly to Russians living under Nicholas I. Belinsky states in his essay, '*Hamlet: Drama Shekspira*' (1838):

"Hamlet is you, I, each of us, that is, anyone who has suffered from incompatibility between reality and one's ideas."

In Nikoloy Polevoy's translation, the play conveyed the sense of the individual's powerlessness in the confrontation with a strong but inert state machine.¹ *Hamlet* was also Ivan Turgenev's favourite Shakespearean hero. He even wrote a story 'Hamlet of the Shchigrov District' in which he depicted the Russian Hamlet. Other characters in Turgenev's novels are typical Hamlet types like Rudin and Sanin ('Spring Waters'). Among Shakespeare's plays Dostovsky mostly appreciated *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *Hamlet* and *King Lear* for their tragic intensity. *Hamlet* in particular influenced mostly Dostoevsky's life. The protagonist of his famous novel 'Crime and Punishment' (1866), Radin Raskolnikov has traces of Hamlet's delirium, confused status of mind. As he says:

"I feel a little bit dizzy, but it is not the point, the fact is I am so sad, so sad!"

This play is also mentioned in his *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880) by Dmitry and Ivan Karamazov in the trial. Another stalwart in Russian literature, Leo Tolstoy had an entirely opposite opinion regarding the

question of Shakespeare's value in the world culture. He remarked in 1896:

“What a coarse, immoral and senseless work *Hamlet* is.”²

His distaste for Shakespeare is most prominent in his essays such as ‘What is Art’ (1897) and ‘About Shakespeare and Drama’ (1906). Tolstoy wrote in the conclusion of his essay on Shakespeare:

“The sooner people will get rid of the false Shakespeare cult, the better.”³ He states that:

“First because people having freed their minds from his falsehood will have to understand that drama not based on the religious principle is not only matter which is neither important nor good, but it is decidedly a most contemptible and trivial thing.”

The Russian society was changing and so was theatre. Conventional drama took a backstage and so also, the productions of Shakespeare. At the beginning of the 20th century, a new kind of drama was introduced into Russian theatre by Anton Chekov. Between 1928-1935, Shakespeare nearly disappeared from the stage being considered by the Bolshevik establishment as “a nostalgic minstrel of the decaying feudal system and spokesman of a decadent aristocracy.”⁴ The attitude to Shakespeare changed in the 1930s. He was proclaimed the proper inheritance of the Proletariat by the first Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934. *Hamlet* was released in May 1938 and was considered a major achievement. Professor Alexander Smirnov responded positively. According to him:

“the text of the brilliant tragedy read seriously and thoughtfully by S.Radlov and the actors of the theatre, he heads. Before the audience clearly gets the basic theme of the tragedy: the struggle of Hamlet, a true humanist, free from all caste restrictions and prejudices with the world around him of meanness, predation and hypocrisy.”⁵

Post revolution, the Moscow Art Theatre became interested in the translation of *Hamlet* in 1939. The contract with the theatre to stage the

play, was signed in September 1939, with the right of first production in early January, 1942. In early November 1939, Boris Pasternak had read out the first two acts of the translation of *Hamlet* and was happily accepted by Nemirovich Danchenko, who had to stage the play. He was so pleased that he terminated the contract with A. Radlova whose translation was made purposefully at the commission of the Moscow Art Theatre. According to Nemirovich the translation was exceptional for its poetic qualities. V.Y.Vilenkin, the head of the literary section became the mediator between Pasternak and the theatre in the name of Nemirovich and actors requiring modifications of the text. Rehearsals went for one and a half year. At the request of the directors and actors, Pasternak made amendments to the text of the translation. This rewritten version of *Hamlet* was handed in 1940. Pasternak longed to see *Hamlet* on stage:

“My only consolation is Art Theatre.”⁶

Regarding his only translated work he wrote to his father in February 1940:

“For me, this work was the perfect salvation from many things... I translated the thoughts, the situations, the pages and the scenes of the original rather than individual words and lines. The translation is very simple, fluent, clear from the first hearing and natural. During false rhetorical gorgeousness there is a great need for direct independent word and I unwittingly obeyed it.”⁷

Due to the second World War the performance of the Moscow Art Theatre was not staged.

After the war, film director Grigory Kozintsev staged *Hamlet* translated by Pasternak on the stage of the Russian state Pushkin Academy Drama Theatre in 1954. Kozintsev in his version of the play eliminated the part of Fortinbras. Kozintsev saw the final performance in the following way: the tragedy is ending, the scenery is pushed apart, Hamlet appears and reads the sonnet 74 as his last monologue. This translation of the sonnet by Pasternak became not a song or a romance but a deep

tragically serious and dramatically intense monologue. Pasternak made Shakespeare more familiar to the Russian ordinary readers. The famous poet, translator and literary critic G. Kruzhkov said:

“It is impossible to explain what Pasternak does in his translations but his work penetrates the heart to the depths.”⁸

In 1971, another famous director Yuri Lyubimov staged *Hamlet* in the translation of Pasternak in the legendary Taganka Theatre, which became one of the world theatre centres in the mid seventies. Pasternak’s great translation of *Hamlet* defined the character in Russian terms – serious, dedicated, self-sacrificing; he is a witness, even a Christ like sufferer. *Hamlet* is not a drama of weakness, but of duty and self-denial. He has been allotted the role of “judge of his own time and servant of the future.”⁹ The play directed by Lyubimov became “one of the highest points of the Taganka Theatre, one of the highest points of Lyubimov’s direction and Lyubimov’s spirit.”¹⁰

Andrea Tarkovsky, one of the most international recognized Russian filmmakers also staged *Hamlet* in 1997, which was not a very successful production. The next version of the play staged at Lenkom Theatre was in 1986 by Russian film director Gleb Panfilov. Panfilov showed the character of Hamlet in a completely different light. He is not a reflective character, moving by inertia but a completely different man transformed both externally and internally. A certain fanaticism of actions and obsessions of the protagonist really shocked the audience of Lenkom. It was clear that Panfilov wanted to show the changes in the society and the character with time in his version. As for the history of theatrical production of Shakespeare’s tragedies in the former Soviet Union is “the history of attempts to turn tragedy into an ironic tragicomedy.”¹¹ In spite of changes of economic and political conditions *Hamlet* of all Shakespeare’s plays continued to appeal most to Russian directors wishing to speak to their times. Between 1994-1998, there were nine productions of the play in Moscow alone. The most sensational among them, was, staged by the German director Peter Stein in 1998, featuring Hamlet playing the saxophone on the stage shaped like a boxing ring and a discotheque scene was inserted in the play to bring the modernist effect.

He used five translations of Shakespeare's tragedy. The locality in which the action proceeds is the boxing ring. Hamlet is in the single combat with the world and with himself.

In the 21st century, Yuri Butusov revived *Hamlet* at Moscow Art Theatre after Chekov for the first time in 2005. The performance caused mixed reviews. Butusov rejected historicity and instead used clowning and buffonary to both offset and augment the play's tragedy. The spectators were astonished by the stage entertainment of the play. Director Valery Fokin's version of *Hamlet* in 2010 at the Alexandrinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg reviewed the play as a vehicle for a complex structure of a soccer stadium patrolled by guard dogs and soldiers in camouflage who threw dead bodies of either shot dissidents or crushed soccer fans into a giant pit. Hamlet was a drunken, dissolute youth. Horatio, a hitchhiking student, Laertes, a star soccer player and Gertrude becomes the cold blooded mastermind and organizer of Hamlet's father's murder. The image of the monumental Gertrude is a key one in this play. She despises men, keeps Claudius in a state of terrified obedience and hides from a dangerous son. Hamlet does not just murder Polonius in a frenzied state but literally murders the body of an old man with a kitchen knife and furiously drags his corpse on the stage. Fokin tried to identify the features of the modern Hamlets with their frantic desire for truth, the rejection of father, falsehood and unwillingness to continue their journey. The performance gave a ruthless analysis of the current state of Russian society gave an uneasy portrait of today's youth. According to J.Grieves:

“Fokin's *Hamlet* confronted the deceit and hypocrisy of the powers – that – be- in a way that evoked other Russian and Soviet performances of the past 200 years that also dared to speak the truth to power.”¹²

Fokin's *Hamlet* largely broke the traditional idea of how to stage Shakespeare's play. However, *Hamlet* still continues to interest Russian public and the directors continue to stage it and the actors dream to play the Danish prince on stage or in a movie. The most recent production of *Hamlet* is by Valeri Sarkisov at the Yermolova Theatre in 2013.

Hamlet, here is portrayed as a young man, who exists in an environment where betrayal, life and death are interwoven. Hamlet is trying to answer a simple question with every step. The director Sarkisov demonstrated an amazing sense of taste, harmony, proportionality and the ability to make a good performance as referred by Alexander Pozdnyakov in his thesis 'Shakespeare's Plays in Russian Culture'.

According to Mark Sokolyansky the most productive years of Shakespeare criticism and critical interpretations occurred within the period of 1960- 1980. Russian Shakespeareology attained an international level in the world of literary and theatrical scholarship. After the collapse of Soviet Union in 1991, Shakespeare studies continued within an unstable political and economic reality. There were no more state restrictions and censorship of book publishing, theatrical and cinematographic productions. On the other hand, the state patronage of publishing houses, theatres and film studios was sharply reduced. As the new period begins from 1990 and moves on to the twenty first century new developments of Russian Shakespeareology trends in. There has been eight productions of *Hamlet* by Russian directors till 2015. The principal aim of this generation was to adopt the new flowering liberalism, tap the Russian genius, imaginative minds undaunted curiosity and re-read Shakespeare texts and plays from new dimensions and modernistic perspectives.

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**Chronicling the Discontents of Urban Existence:
A Critical Analysis of Girish Karnad's *Boiled Beans on Toast***

Awanish Rai and Madhukar Rai

Abstract:

In the canon of modern Indian drama, Girish Karnad emerges as a formidable presence whose phenomenal experimentations with theatre infused it with a renewed vigour and contemporary appeal for over six decades post 1960s. The present article attempts to discuss his play *Boiled Beans on Toast* written in 2014 and how through this play Karnad presents before us a direct and realistic view of modern India. Taking the unprecedented urbanization of Bangalore as its subject, he weaves a masterful narrative that moves beyond the stereotypical portrayal of the city as an IT hub to talk about the diverse experiences of its inhabitants and their relentless quest for identity and joy as they navigate the pressures of survival in an enormously competitive society grappling with the effects of globalization.

This paper also seeks to analyse the escalating problems of urban migration, unplanned urbanization and the detrimental impact it has unleashed on the environment. This play is thus a commentary about the discontentment and frustrations of metropolitan life marked by mechanized and mercenary preoccupations leading to a gradual erosion of the foundational values of life of mutual support and cohesion in present day relationships.

Keywords: Bangalore, urbanization, globalization, discontentment, technological hub, concrete jungle, ecological destruction.

Girish Karnad's illustrious career, marked by his philosophical studies and contributions to the re-definition of Indian theatre, showcases his multifaceted talent as a playwright, actor, and director, earning him numerous accolades. His plays, rich in emotional depth and factual resonance, may seem rooted in regional issues but resonate with the global challenges faced by humanity. Set against the backdrop of Bangalore's origin myth, Girish Karnad's play *Boiled Beans on Toast* presents a vivid picture of life in India's Silicon Valley, capturing the city's unprecedented rise over the past two decades.

The title of the play is derived from a legend about Bengaluru's name, which originated from an act of kindness involving boiled beans in the 11th century. According to legend, in the 11th century, King Veera Ballala, lost his way while hunting in the jungle and arrived exhausted at a lonely hut where an old woman saved his life by offering him a handful of beans (*benda kaalu* in Kannada, the native tongue) leading him to name the place "*Bendakaaluru*," or "city of boiled beans." Over time, this name evolved into "Bengaluru" and was later anglicized to "Bangalore." The term "toast," however, represents a western influence on Indian cuisine, signifying the city's modern transformation. Devina Dutt, an acclaimed artist and translator based in Mumbai describes the play as a masterful narrative that focuses on Bangalore's rapid development over the past two decades. It moves beyond the stereotypical portrayal of the city as an IT hub or a cluster of call centers, instead weaving the diverse experiences of Bangalore's inhabitants, shaped by their hopes, ambitions and disenchantments.

Boiled Beans on Toast is Karnad's tribute to Bangalore, India's technological hub. The narrative delves into the lives of its diverse inhabitants: a traditional housewife upset over urban development, an ambitious newcomer chasing the outsourcing dream and a cunning maid navigating survival at any cost. The play humorously critiques the societal shifts brought on by rapid urbanization. The play's title cleverly juxtaposes western and Indian elements, mirroring the city's blend of contrasting values and lifestyles. It features a well-to-do family amidst societal transformation, symbolized by the felling of a tree—a metaphor for

environmental destruction in favor of urban sprawl. Set primarily in Anjana Padabidri's home, the plot reveals her husband's global business ventures which keeps him perennially busy with his foreign trips and her own volunteer work at a hospice for cancer patients just to keep herself engaged in the absence of her husband. Their only son, Kunaal, a highly modern and city bred lad has the least concern for the wishes of his parents and aspires to be a musician, while his grandmother who is on one of her frequent sojourns to Bangalore from their hometown of Dharwad, means to enjoy her stay in the city. The household staff that includes two servants namely Vimala and Muttu, employed in the roles of a cook and a house help reveal unseen facets of life in big cities. The play also introduces Rajlakshmi Iyer alias Dolly Iyer, a recent settler in the city and Anjana's friend who teaches elocution in a girls public school next to her house and prefers to spend her off periods in Anjana's living room since it is "much nicer than the dreary staffroom" of her school. One day, while Anjana is sitting with Dolly in her living room and having tea, a person by the name of Prabhakar Telang, arrives at her house in search of her husband, Mr. Padabidri claiming that he had asked him to meet him at home that morning. Initially Anjana is confounded at his sudden arrival, failing to understand why her husband would invite him to their house when he himself is abroad. Prabhakar tells her about the reason of his visit- its regarding a post in Mr. Padabidri's office. This further perplexes her since her husband has now moved from Administration to the Finance Department and is in no position to offer any post to anybody. The interaction that ensues gives the audience a peek into the competitive and harsh world of corporate life marked by inequities in salary structures, covert favoritism, quitting posts for better opportunities in other companies, job insecurity, and so on. Prabhakar in the course of the conversation discloses that he is actually there to meet Mr. Padabidri as a gesture of courtesy so that he could convince him to hire him as one of the managers along with the others who will be joining his company. While Anjana offers him tea, Prabhakar in order to prolong the conversation highlights the deafening noise outside her house where the City Corporation officials are razing the trees in order to widen the road.

Prabhakar: The road outside your house is like a scene from a war movie.

Anjana: They're building an underpass there, so they are chopping down the trees.

Dolly: The problem is our City Corporation is run by people born and brought up in the countryside. They have no time for greenery and environment. They simply love cement concrete, and plastic and glass-fronted buildings. That means modernity to them.

Prabhakar's reply to Dolly is interesting. As a person who has come from the village in search of a stable career in a large metropolis like Bangalore, Prabhakar seems mesmerized by the city's bustling crowds and concrete infrastructure as evident through his words-

Prabhakar: Like me, you mean? But then you see, you can't blame them. A city is meant for people, so that they can live there. Madam, I grew up in the heart of the western ghats- the thickest of forests- near Mundgod and I grew up yearning for the texture of cement concrete and the grand sight of glass fronted skyscrapers I saw on television. (14-15)

People like Anjana and her husband who came to the city when it was still possible to buy a piece of land to construct bungalows along tranquil avenues are now anguished by the intolerable noise that has destroyed their peaceful existence owing to the unabated construction activities like road widening and urban beautification projects to make space for the new comers. Prabhakar on the contrary is ensnared by the 'glass fronted skyscrapers' and finds the city as a release from his monotonous life in the village. Dolly Iyer unlike Anjana is a late settler in the city along with her husband Brigadier Iyer and lives in an apartment after having failed to find land in a decent location of the city. Their conversations highlight the significance of space in a metropolitan city- a clear marker of status and class privilege in the 21st century. Anjana nostalgically reminisces how the rain tree that stands in front of their house was the main reason she chose to build her house there, when she came to the city fifteen years ago. She recalls having said to her

son, “Look Kunaal that is a rain tree. It has bipinnate leaves- like feathers-they open up in the sun so you have shade under it during the day and they fold in at night so moonlight filters through” (15) That was the moment they made their mind to build their house there, planning its design in such a way that the terrace would be under the tree and they could have regular dinner parties there. Prabhakar in his characteristic style comments, “You only have to dream of something and you could turn it into a reality. How marvellous!” (15)

However things have taken an unexpected turn in the last one and a half decade and now the City Corporation has decided to cut down all the trees along the road to connect the wide road in front of their house to the Mysore Arterial Road converting it into a highway along with an underpass to accommodate the huge swarm of traffic in the city. Anjana’s desperation can be evinced from her words, “Kunaal and I, we love that rain tree and I’ve sworn that the day the tree goes I’m leaving” Dolly says that for her and her army retired husband ‘a comfortable apartment’ was the only option left after trying hard to purchase a bungalow as clear through her words: “My husband was posted here in Bangalore when he was in service and fondly remembered the Cantonment bungalows. The pillars, porticos, and the monkey top windows. We come here now and bungalows! Ha! (Throws up hands dramatically). We decided to settle for a comfortable apartment.” (16)

Prabhakar sarcastically remarks. “Comfortable! Lucky you, Madam! You should see our flat. It’s the size of a handkerchief. But then who asked me to come to Bengaluru? With people pouring into the city...” (16)

While they are having these interactions, Anusuya Padabidri, Anjana’s mother-in-law who has arrived from Dharwad to spend a few days with her son and daughter-in-law is seen to be leaving for some shopping outside. She stops only to be greeted by Dolly who inquires about her health while she rants about how she was allotted an upper berth in the train en-route to Bangalore despite her age being clearly printed in the ticket adding a tinge of humour to the narrative. Anusuya despite being an old lady is very passionate about enjoying her stay in the city marked

by her frequent itineraries to shopping malls, temples as well as the race course. She also mentions how she came across a report in the newspaper that day about the race course being moved out of the city. Dolly explains to her that “there is a news that the Chief Minister has his eyes on all that open space in the heart of the city. A gold mine.” (18) This points to a very crucial aspect of life in Bangalore where land is a precious asset, with the government too making attempts to encroach upon the available tracts of open land so that the real estate giants could build posh housing societies there directly enriching the state coffers.

Prabhakar’s fascination with the city and its traffic is such that he compares it with his first experience of looking at the sea at Gokarn near his village, “When I was young I was taken to Gokarn, to the beach. And I had never seen the sea before. I had grown up in the jungles and although the sea was less than fifty miles away, had no idea what it looked like. And I was mesmerized. Waves after waves after waves and then water, right up to the horizon. Our traffic too is like that. Waves after waves of scooters, auto rickshaws, buses, cars, every conceivable kind of vehicle including bullock carts, tractors and earth movers. It’s magical.” (25)

While their conversations are still on, Anjana receives a call on her phone from her hospice and excuses herself informing Prabhakar that it’s not possible to meet Mr. Padabidri since he will not be back for the next four or five days. Just after Anjana’s departure, Dolly initiates an important aspect of the play. She offers to help Prabhakar with his career to his utter surprise since it’s unbelievable to expect any help from a stranger especially with jobs in the silicon city marked by fraudulence and a blind pursuit of material wealth. She pretends to know some very influential people belonging to the corporate and administrative sector asking him to meet her at the Café Coffee Day for further discussion. Prabhakar’s determination to find a good job in the city forces him to blindly trust Dolly’s false claims. He represents those thousands of young individuals surging into the city with high hopes and dreams to make it big in life no matter the ordeal as clear through his words when they meet each other in the CCD café in Act 1, Scene five “I could have been rotting in Mundgond. I am fortunate to be in Bengaluru-

Bangalore. That's what I care about. This itself is release. The city air however polluted is an oxygen chamber, after the suffocation of a small town." (27) In order to sound elite he has also learned new words like cappuccino, latte and espresso while waiting for Dolly's arrival.

Dolly, comprehending his innocent nature is quick to come to the point. She offers Prabhakar a job as a Regional Manager in the Singapore office of Wipro, one of the leading IT firms claiming that she is a close friend of its owner Azim Premji, since his wife Yasmeen and she were college batch mates. Prabhakar, overwhelmed at her proposal fails to look through her sinister designs as why a person like him should be offered such a prestigious position in a renowned company. She tells him, "Look they have no shortage of people vying to get into the firm. They will have a rioting mob if the news leaks out. Its top secret. Don't even mention it to anyone. Or go to the Internet." She emphasizes that before going for the interview which she assures will be nothing more than a mere formality, he needs to resign from his present job even if it implies paying a penalty of two months' salary by luring him with the prospects of six times the salary which he receives from his current employer, lavish accommodation and even a personal car for travelling, all to be given by his new company.

Though Dolly's provocations force him to introspect for a while, since his daughter studies in a good English medium school and he has just brought his wife to stay with him in Bangalore but he finally makes his mind to do as suggested by her, convinced that it's just a couple of months for things to be permanently settled once he joins his new job. His unquestioning surrender to her false fabrications exemplifies his eagerness to build a successful career. Dolly leaves after telling him that he will have to go to the Electronic City and report at the Human Resource Office of Wipro for petty formalities before he is assigned to depart for Singapore by the month end to join his service.

In Act Two, Scene three, we are shown the Reception of the Wipro office. Prabhakar can be seen entering wearing a new suit, a bright new tie and shoes hoping to meet Mr. Gopalan for a formal meeting. His interaction with the Receptionist however reveals that he has no

appointment with Mr. Gopalan as informed by Dolly. When she informs him that Mr. Gopalan is not in the office that day and she has no idea when he will be back expressing her inability to help him in any way possible, he loses his calm and says, “ Look, it’s not just a matter of my job. It’s my whole life. I have taken a loan of seventy thousand. My entire future – every-thing hinges on this-this one meeting. Call it an interview, a meeting, anything. You understand what I’m saying, don’t you? I have resigned a very nice job-”(53)

In his fit of paranoia, he dials up Dolly expecting her to resolve the confusion. Dolly picks up his call, gives him a false assurance of reverting back in the nick of time after having a word of confirmation from Mr. Premji and disconnects the call. The Receptionist having been a witness to this unusual situation says, “I hope you don’t mind my saying so, Sir. But since I joined Wipro I’ve never heard of Mr. Premji or his colleagues recommending anyone like this personally. It’s entirely against the spirit of Wipro. People are selected on merit...” Prabhakar waits helplessly there for some time and finally realizing that he has been befooled, leaves the place in dejection.

In Act Two, Scene six, Dolly is seen sitting in Anjana’s living room, with the blaring noise of the cement mixer off stage symbolizing the construction of the underpass going on in full swing outside. The doorbell is heard and as she is busy on a call, Prabhakar enters to interrogate her as to why she treated him in such a manner. To defend herself she begins fabricating fresh lies accusing him of having left the Wipro office when she called him back ultimately throwing the blame on Prabhakar for making her feel insulted before her friends against all the help she rendered to him. The veil of fantasy having fallen from his eyes, Prabhakar now realizes the gruelling pressure for survival in Bengaluru, comparing his struggle to the monstrous machines used for construction-

“And I was fascinated by that mixer with its huge grotesque striped belly. And those bright yellow long necked earth diggers and extractors with sharp claws and fangs. What are they here for? For me. So I could use these streets. Go over flyovers. Flow with the crowds. To give meaning to all this –this mess, this chaos. I keep asking myself: what

keeps things working at all here? What drives these crowds? Hope, ambition. Whatever. It's our version of the American dream, which would have horrified my parents, but has brought me to Bangalore. It seemed poised to lead me to Singapore. But no matter. Despite the lesson you have taught me Dolly, I promise you, I shall pursue that dream. I shall be relentless in a..." (64)

Apart from the primary narrative of Anjana, Dolly and Prabhakar, Karnad also presents the parallel story of Anjana's two servants-Vimala and Muttu and their precarious lives in search of stability and sustenance balancing their professional duties and personal aspirations. In the very opening scene of the play in Act One we are introduced to both of them working in the house of Anjana. While Vimala on account of working for many years in the house has won the trust of her keeper being aware of even her minute details ranging from the quantity of sugar she takes with tea to her medicines, Muttu being a new recruit is struggling to establish herself in the house as clearly expressed in the way Vimala keeps dictating her. It highlights the implicit power dynamics in big cities where it's almost impossible to manage the household without servants. Vimala's influence in the house can be gauged from the fact that on one occasion when Muttu's mother and brother Shankara come to meet her in order to discuss about the marriage of her daughter Kalpana, who has come of age, Vimala cautions her, " You know the rules perfectly well. Amma doesn't like all this crowding and holding your family conferences here. Muttu's been given a mobile and you know what that's for... If you had called Muttu on the mobile, she would have come out for a while. There is no need for you to storm into the house like an army. Please don't do it again." (6)

Scene Two in Act One presents the idea about "mobile phones", which has become an indispensable part of urban culture with even the working middle class finding it hard to survive without it emphasizing the value of communication in big cities. Karnad here makes use of the idea of mobile phones as a symbol of modern urban identity. He specifically conveys the distancing of people from their traditional roots in an indirect way through the discussion between Muttu and Shankara in the following lines-

Muttu: You shouldn't have just come in like this. It annoys Amma. You know that, Mother. We could've met at home in the evening. Or if you'd called me, I would've come out.

Shankara: (annoyed): There are things you can't talk about on the phone. You said you want to have all the rituals done here in Bengaluru. Why? What do we have in this city? All our relations live in Karimangala or Solagiri. They can't come this far for the ceremony.

Muttu: Husband said Karimangala would mean expense. The remotest relatives will turn up. In Bengaluru, we have a smaller affair. More compact.

Mother: What's the point of spending unnecessarily?

Shankara: That's what happens when people move to the city. The family back home, relatives, connections—they all become dispensable, don't they? They can be put aside. Ignored. Forgotten. (7-8)

The play represents the multiple facades people exhibit in order to sound acceptable in society while their actions contradict their moral and ethical propositions revealing their true colours as presented by the turn of events in the play. Having convinced both his Mother and Muttu to hold the ceremony of Kalpana (Muttu's daughter) at their village, Shankara departs. Act Two begins with a scene in which we are taken to Karimangala town to Shankara's house where the rituals of Kalpana's coming of age ceremony is in progress with women and girls of the house decked in finery. Shankara and Ravi, Muttu's husband are sitting in a corner of the room, a bit drunken. As soon as Muttu's mother invites Shankara to perform his rites being the maternal uncle, he gets angry, refusing to do anything and starts accusing his mother of leaving him alone with his grandmother while he was a child in Karimangala for Bangalore with the young Muttu, when she was widowed. Muttu's mother retorts at such an accusation reminding him how after the death of his father, his grandmother and other family members threw her and Muttu out of the house as unwanted liabilities on the fortune of the family. She vividly recalls her plight, "Shiva, Shiva! How can you blame me? What choice did I have? You were a male child. You think your

grandparents would have let me take you with me? They slung me out of the house with Muttu, saying they couldn't look after us. That we were a millstone. We lived like beggars, like roofless orphans, in that monster city. And when I found a job 'twas as a seamstress, chained to that sewing machine eight hours a day. Often even ten hours. What happiness did I ever see? It was all for you children". Shankara refuses to believe her and keeps accusing her of being unfair towards his daughters.

Shankara: Don't you dare mention my children. How often did you spare a thought for us once you went there, eh? How often have you visited us?

Mother: Would your grandparents have let us into the house? I was the inauspicious woman who'd killed their son. But didn't your daughters come to the city? Didn't they stay with us in their holidays? We all loved having them. Didn't they enjoy the city?

Shankara: And came back hating this dump and our life here. You showed off nicely, I grant you that. Displayed how you and Muttu had flourished in the city, without us. How you'd prospered. And isn't that what you're here for now? To crow to our friends and relations-

Mother: God forbid. It was you who insisted we should have the rites here. You know that. You said we must have it here-

Shankara: Yes, so you would remember we're alive here. I had to practically drag you here. Would you've come otherwise? My wife's had two deliveries and you never offered to help. (46-47)

He does not stop even at this. He starts accusing Muttu's husband of living off on the proceeds of his mother's income which enrages Ravi culminating in a bitter brawl between the two disrupting the ceremonial rites with the entire ambience turning into a battleground displaying the latent tensions and grudges between the migrant city dwelling wage earners and the family left behind in the village.

In Scene Six, matters take a precarious turn when Anjana sitting in her living room receives a call from the Tilaknagar Police Station informing her about Vimala's alleged theft in the house of someone by the name

of Saroja Kunigal aged about forty five where Vimala was working for the past six months without the knowledge of Anjana. Anjana visits the police station in this regard and is upset to discover that someone whom she blindly trusted over the years has been implicated in stealing a gold necklace. Out of her affection for Vimala she rings up the DIG of Police Mr. Infant, a friend but fails to contact him at the moment. She then calls her husband and briefs him about the whole situation stating that she would go back to the police station with a lawyer to rescue her but much to her ire she finds that Mr. Padabidri is more concerned about Kunaal's activities which he finds to be in negation of the values that he had inculcated in him.

In Scene eight, the play takes us to the police station where the Inspector is sitting behind the table along with other characters like Vimala, Kunaal, and Saroja Kunigal who can be seen fuming with rage. When the Inspector refers to Vimala as Vimala Thimmegowda, Saroja raises an objection proclaiming that her real name is Vimala Mary Amaldas and that she is not a Saraswat Brahmin but a Christian. Saroja cites how she personally investigated about her details and that she lives in Kamraj Road with her parents who too are Christians and have migrated from Velankanni to the city. She reveals that Vimala had been working in their house for the past six months which surprises Kunaal. The following conversation gives us a hint about how it's difficult to ascertain the authenticity of domestic helps in big cities working under disguised identities to sustain themselves.

Saroja: Don't believe a word of hers. I know she never told your mother she was working for us. She insisted it had to be kept quiet.

Inspector: And you agreed? Didn't you ask for a reference?

Saroja: We knew she was working in their house. That was reference enough for me. I desperately needed someone to look after my mother. So I accepted. I shouldn't have, of course. I know that now. But she seemed so nice.

Inspector: So you didn't inform her mistress that you were going to employ her.

Saroja: No. To be honest. I didn't. No.

Inspector: You kept it a secret?

Saroja: There was nothing to be secretive about. She went to their house to start cooking at eight-thirty in the morning. She agreed to come to our house an hour earlier and finish her duties within the hour. She didn't want to mix up the two jobs. It made sense. (37)

Saroja goes on to accuse Vimala of robbing her mother of her heavy gold necklace, which the elderly woman removed each morning before she bathed her, and running away with it. She followed her all the way to the Padabidri residence, where she was discovered conversing with "her boyfriend," the auto-driver. (38). Vimala's sharp response, "You ladies who are educated, you can only think of dirty things the moment you see a single woman," is, once again, representative of all domestic helps in India (39). When contradicting information is revealed, the debate gets worse: While Saroja claims to have met her parents two days ago, Vimala claims to live in the slum of Uttarahalli and not Kadreguppe, which is the address she had provided Anjana eight years ago. Vimala implies that her father is no longer living by claiming that she lived there with her parents while he was alive. When Kunaal, the observer, offers to drive Saroja, Vimala, and the two constables, one of whom is a woman to Vimala's house in Uttarahalli, further turmoil is in store. Everyone leaves the scene except for Kunaal. He describes the trip to Uttarahalli as "an absolute nightmare from which there was no way of waking up" (41) in a monologue he delivers to his friend, Nandita, over the phone. Upon reaching the address Vimala had given everyone much to their surprise he finds a middle aged woman whom Vimala claims to be her sister-in-law. She behaves in a peculiar way seeing them, seems uninterested to answer their questions and finally leaves citing some work. "Ask the man of the house when he comes back" is the only refrain she utters (43). Vimala presses her and the only thing she admits is that she knows her but she hasn't seen her in the last six months, claiming that she lives with them, sleeping in the kitchen with their kids. (44). The interrogations having yielded no fruitful results, he drops the constables at a nearby auto stand and immediately rings

Nandita once more. His impassioned exchange with her serves as his gathering of information from what he has seen:

“I was flabbergasted, Nandita. Absolutely stunned. She’s been with us for nearly eight years and we’ve been saying oh such a nice woman, so reliable. And you know, every sentence she uttered to the police and to me was a lie. A bright, white, brazen lie. And she knew that I knew and the police knew that she was fibbing. And what courage! What invention! She was leading us on, she was creating a story from one minute to another. I tell you. She’s my heroine. I’ve never seen such such-what’s the word-creativity! How could we’ve missed her brilliance?” (44)

He turns the phone off. In his ensuing soliloquy, he expresses his amazement at Vimala’s astute method of devising a survival plan in this strange, hostile, and competitive environment—a common tactic used by all domestic helps in urbanized India: “She is just wonderful. If only she could be my girlfriend. I think I have fallen in love with her (44) with the scene ending with his exclamations of appreciation, “What a woman! A true heroine!” (44)

The play also sheds light on the peculiar habits of Anjana’s mother-in-law, Anusuya Padabidri who despite coming from a comparatively traditional place like Dharwad is eager to enjoy her stay in the city to its leas. In Act One, Scene four we are taken to the gallery of the Bengaluru race course where Anusuya and Sundara Rajan, an office employee of Mr. Padabidri entrusted to look after her can be seen watching a thrilling horse race. After having watched a couple of matches, Anusuya out of her excitement begins to start baiting on selective horses in a bid to try her luck. Though inexperienced in the art of gambling, she feels delighted upon winning a few bets initially but eventually losing larger stakes. She however does not stop there. Undeterred she encourages her aide Sundara Rajan to borrow four thousand rupees from Brigadier Iyer whom she spots at the venue confident that she will win the final race. Anusuya embodies the care free, affluent visitor seeking pleasure without concern for expenses. In Scene five, back at the Race Course Anusuya bets twenty thousand

rupees on Flash Past, inspired by her daughter Leena's recent visit to Serengetti Park in Nairobi where she lives. Despite Sundara Rajan's repeated warnings she confirms her spot only to lose the bait in the end and fainting on account of the unexpected loss. Later she leaves Bangalore with a huge debt that she had borrowed from a person named Mr. Raykar to support her gambling habits without the knowledge of Anjana or her husband. It's only Kunaal who knows about her secret dealings revealing it to his mother once she has left.

The play also delves into the lives of flamboyant youngsters who lack social and moral beliefs. Represented through the character of Kunaal, the young generation seeks exemption from the traditions and values enforced by the older generation. Their concept of personal space is distorted, and the line between right and wrong is blurred. Kunaal, a budding musician in his late teens, performs with a band in pubs and restaurants. He embodies the typical rebellious teenager, convinced that parental financial support for his expensive whims is his prerogative. Simultaneously, he expects his father not to impose any parental authority on him. Unaffected by the deviations around him, Kunaal views significant matters indifferently.

One evening after Dolly departs, Anjana and Kunaal are left on their own. Kunaal is curious to know why his father called his mother that day. Anjana informs him that his father called her to express his disapproval about his recent use of the credit card to purchase an expensive guitar. His father wants him to simply complete his studies, but he wants to be a musician. Anjana, torn between her husband and her kid, wishes she hadn't been involved in their argument. Anjana's love for her son Kunaal is evident in the freedom she grants him, yet she finds herself caught in the crossfire between her husband and son, yearning for tranquility amidst their constant disputes. Their chat reveals the underlying tension between the older generation's conventional ideas and the young generation raised in the city with little concern for them. When questioned about a band member's sexual orientation, he dismisses it casually-

Anjana: Papa has received an anonymous letter saying- your drummer is gay.

Kunaal: I can't believe it! Perhaps he is. Perhaps he is a transsexual. What am I supposed to do about it? He drums like a god.

Anjana: And that the pad or the club or whatever it is where you play has a reputation for rave parties and drugs. (20)

Kunaal rather leaves his mother alone finding it futile to argue with his father. Kunaal's ideas about life is at odds with his father. The ambition for academic success on the part of Kunaal's father contrasts with his unusual lifestyle. In Act Two, Scene eight, his frank discussion with his grandmother one night reveals his divergent outlook on life and family. Anusuya asks him about his band, his parents' disapproval of it, and his decision to give up playing the veena, which he used to play so well once. Kunaal's reply is crucial to understand how the modern youth are swayed by fanciful ideas to achieve easy fame by carving a new niche for themselves in a constantly evolving music industry where mash-ups and duets are in vogue because no one likes to listen to traditional compositions anymore-, "That's it, Grandma. I consider myself an avatar of Saint Purandara Dasa too. Truly. He composed his own songs. So do I. He broke away from traditional music. So have I. And he never played in the royal courts. He took to the streets. You told me that. And that I don't play in the pompous concert halls either. For me it's the clubs, garages and pubs. I don't believe in God. But in a way, I suppose, music is my god." (72)

In the play, Karnad presents his characters with a raw honesty, allowing them to embody the city's complex narrative without authorial interjection. The play, while appearing casual, is rich with subtle complexities. Kunaal stands out as a true product of the city, representing its rapid growth and the collective quest for self-gratification, untethered by traditional moral constraints. Kunaal learns from Anusuya that his mother, Anjana used to be a good singer but sacrificed her talent to look after her father post marriage. Her profound loneliness, once led her to befriend a Bengali neighbour who later left, fearing entrapment in their relationship. Anjana's marital despair drives her to attempt suicide, an act that robs her of her voice. It is not the neighbour's departure but his final words that wound her deeply. Years later, Anjana finds solace

at Karunashraya, a hospice for cancer patients, where a request from a dying patient reawakens her singing talent. She recounts it as a moment of her personal redemption, “I suddenly found myself singing...” capturing the moment of rediscovery.” Later in the play she herself confides this dark episode to Kunaal, revealing the depths of her despair. This revelation leads Kunaal to a profound realization about his own mortality and the world’s indifference to one’s existence, inspiring him to compose a song in tribute to Bangalore.

In essence, the play is a commentary on the tangled existence of Bangalore’s residents, depicting how individuals from varied backgrounds and regions are drawn into the city’s chaotic rhythm, sometimes losing sight of their origins as their paths diverge or unexpectedly intersect. The unchecked urbanization of cities like Bangalore, at the expense of the environment, is a central concern of the play criticizing both the urban authorities for their lack of concern for environmental damage and the city’s residents for being oblivious to the ecological dangers that future generations will face. Karnad’s work calls for deep reflection on urban development and the widening gap between the rich and the poor. Girish Karnad’s engagement with the urban evolution of Bengaluru is deeply personal, as he himself has been directly affected by the city’s aggressive expansion. His lifelong involvement in civic movements to preserve the city’s green spaces too finds a cultural resonance through this play. His observations have proved immensely relevant over the passage of time if we take a look at a recent study conducted by Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore. A report published in the *Times of India* dated 14th March, 2024 states that Bangalore has seen a sharp 1055% rise in built up areas, concrete structures and paved surfaces over the last few decades in a study conducted by experts from IISc Bangalore. These revelations come amid a severe shortage of water gripping the city with an alarming 79% fall in the water spread area of the region affecting the availability of precious commodities and 88% loss of vegetation impacting the sequestration of respiratory carbon in the last fifty years. Over the last fifty years due to reckless construction, the water surface has shrunk considerably. Of the remaining water bodies, 98% of the lakes are encroached upon and 90% of them are filled with

untreated sewage and heaps of garbage. The city's built up area which was just 8% in 1973 has notched up to 93.3% in 2023 leading to a significant loss of green cover with only 1.5 million trees to support Bengaluru's population of 9.5 million indicating one tree for every seven people in the city. Bangalore has now morphed itself into a giant concrete jungle from a peaceful little village it was decades ago replete with pollution, inequitable distribution of natural resources, traffic jams, congestion, slums, unemployment and uncontrolled urbanization. The government's inaction in framing sustainable policies has caused an environmental crisis for the state with the city of a thousand lakes now home to a concrete jungle. (TOI Report, 14 Mar, 24) The play thus set in Bengaluru, serves as a microcosm of the nation, addressing issues from migration to environmental degradation and the varying interpretations of progress.

Lillete Dubey who directed the play faced the challenge of translating local dialects into English without losing their authenticity or resorting to stereotypes as she had to ensure that the dialogues had to reflect the social classes of the characters, ensuring that each voice was distinct and true to life. The play uses this motif to represent the local populace grappling with the effects of globalization on their everyday existence. The famous American theater artist and director Stella Adler's belief that 'theatre should convey life's truths' resonates with "*Boiled Beans on Toast*," which got staged as part of the 'Deccan Herald Theatre.' Prakash Belawadi, in the director's note '*The City In Question*' emphasizes the play's subtle depth, despite its light-hearted appearance, and its portrayal of the city as a complex entity. The escalating noise on stage symbolizes Bengaluru's rapid expansion, becoming almost intolerable. In his directorial note, Belawadi reflects on the city's transformation. Dolly Iyer reminisces about Bangalore's past charm, while Anjana Padabidri grapples with the city's relentless development. Prabhakar Telang, representing newcomers to the city, embraces the urban landscape that he once admired from afar, questioning the motivations that draw people to the metropolis and highlighting the city as a sanctuary from the monotony of rural life. The characters, chasing unattainable dreams, embody the perpetual search for fulfillment. The play resonates with the themes of contemporary

Indian literature, emphasizing urban life and cultural shifts as the country progresses reflecting the soul-searching of a city amidst modernization. Notable authors like Kamala Markandaya, Anita Nair and Amitav Ghosh have similarly explored the challenges of modernity in an urban context.

In the narrative, Prabhakar emerges as a significant figure, embodying the rural man's deep fascination with urban life. His journey, however, leads to his downfall, ensnared by the negative aspects of modernity, as depicted by the character of Dolly. According to Karnad, the characters of Prabhakar and Dolly are real representatives of two types of culture. Prabhakar represents the purity of the countryside, unknowingly falls into the black hole of modernity's evilness. Dolly on the other hand represents the complete falseness, evilness and ugly face of the modern culture of Bangalore.

The play offers a nuanced critique of the city's current cultural landscape and the factors shaping it. Neethu P. Antony in her article titled "*A Peep into the 'Urban': An Analysis of The Theme of Modernity in Karnad's Boiled Beans on Toast*" delves into a critical examination of Karnad's portrayal of modernity through his characters' narratives. Anjana engages herself at a hospice for cancer patients. She sacrifices her talent for her family living as an "idle rich housewife." Eventually, with her work in Karunashraya, she discovers her essence. Dolly pretends to be a well-known woman having connections with influential figures messing up other people's lives because her own life is messed up. Anusuya, the mother-in-law of Anjana, regularly visits race-course and bets money to while away her time. Her grandson Kunaal cherishes his own ambition of playing guitar in bands. The discord between the maidservants, Muttu and Vimala, in Anjana's household mirrors this theme of alienation. Their relationship is fractured by jealousy and pointless rivalry. When Vimala, the cook, fails to show up for work, Muttu takes the opportunity to step into her role. The playwright paints a picture of the working class as lacking solidarity, driven by self-preservation and duplicity. When Vimala discovers her termination, she in a fit of revenge accuses Muttu, of stealing her work in her absence. She blackmails Muttu by saying that his brother Shankara is lying wounded in a hospital

but does not reveal the name of the hospital causing distress to Muttu's mother.

Another side of Bangalore is also exposed when Kunaal talks to Nandita on the phone. To find out about Vimala's house, he visits a new residential extension in Uttarahalli. He says: "Indeed, there was no solid ground to step on - only holes. Dirt, plastic bags, piles of garbage where dogs are tearing up blood-soaked menstrual cramps... And in one place water suddenly fell, as if seeping through from the underworld... women who were washing, pots and pans on the side. From the road and houses! Oh god! They were like cardboard boxes in my father's warehouse - almost stacked one on top of the other (41).

At the end of the play, Kunaal says to Nandita, "I just realized something I never thought of before... This world, this city, Bangalore, my friends, my family, you – everything would be there, but not me (79)". He then talks about his new composition and the first line is "Big Bang Bangalore is a Big Black Hole! (80)". Only later does he realize one's existence or inexistence has no relevance in a huge city like Bengaluru.

This play is a direct and realistic view of modern India. Karnad says, "Though the original play is about Bangalore as a city and Bangaloreans, it could be a story about any other developing city like Pune, Hyderabad or Chandigarh". In the Preface to the play, Shanta Gokhale states, "In *Boiled Beans on Toast*, the main character is the city of Bangalore, a throbbing organism spawned by globalization....It is a place of wild hopes and dashed dreams, of disappointment and despair, of environmental destruction and rapid development (vii) Even playing Karnad's *Boiled Beans on Toast*, director Mohit Takalkar notes: "In all my previous plays. The cast was large, it was just four or five central characters, but here the characters are well defined, but no one is the main character. In fact, the main character is the city..."

Through these intertwined stories and, poignant silhouettes of urban existence "*Boiled Beans on Toast*" examines the shimmering facade of modern urban life, exposing the moral vacuums and social disconnections that lie beneath. The play thus paints a stark picture of the hardships

faced by individuals like Muttu and Vimala whose dire circumstances force her to do jobs at multiple places, as survival in an urban landscape is her primary concern. The anonymity of the city shields her true identity, making it challenging for even the police to locate her as expressed by the Constable when Kunaal asks him if he is going to arrest her, “Arrest her? What for? What’s the point? (Laughs) Our prisons have no spare capacity, Sir. Bengaluru’s bursting with women like her. Where they live, how they live, how they move around- it’s all a mystery. Impossible to pin them down. Like scorpions, you know. They only have to see a slab of stone and they will crawl under it and set up house.” (44)

Like Vimala, many people in today’s society continue to live their lives without any certainty about their future. Although the policeman knows the truth, he is helpless. Instead of blaming people, political parties and government officials he could have served the welfare of the poor who find it difficult to cope in a city without basic services. The play encourages viewers and readers to ponder about the harsh truths of life and think openly.

The play is thus in a sense satirical, and the author seems unapologetic in presenting the shortcomings of society appealing for greater introspection and attitudinal change. It also reminds readers of the various forms of corruption that exists in most organizations. Almost all the characters in the play are disappointed in their lives. They are obsessed with elusive goals, and as a consequence, their lives have become an endless quest for fulfillment. The play invokes people to change themselves for the sake of societal development, giving up their self-centered actions and petty trifles. Karnad does not want to lead his readers to delusional grandiosity, but tries to awaken them by asking them to think about economic, social, cultural and political challenges. He carefully presents his observations through references, hints and implications rather than direct disclosure. His motive seems to be to let the readers decide instead of imposing his ideology.

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**Dissent without Discord:
A Study of Shailesh Parekh's *Gandhi vs Tagore***

Mausumi Sen Bhattacharjee

Abstract

Shailesh Parekh's play *Gandhi vs Tagore* was first performed in 2009 by the Bangalore Little Theatre in Santiniketan in front of 'Shyamali' – the mud house in the "Udayan" premises to celebrate an immortal but baffling bonding that existed between Gandhi and Tagore. As Jawaharlal Nehru writes about this unique relationship, "Gurudeva and Gandhiji ... both were hundred percent India's children and inheritors, representatives and expositors of her age-long culture ... The surprising thing is that both of these men with so much in common and drawing inspiration from the same wells of wisdom and thought and culture should differ from each other so greatly".

Between 1915 and 1941 Tagore and Gandhi met in Santiniketan, Ahmedabad, Kolkata Pune and Delhi and over three and a half decades, their turbulent opinions and feelings ebbed, flowed and evolved to a rather debatable friendship. This essay seeks to study the play and explore the nuances underscored by the playwright while trying to weave a dramatic representation of an imagined conversation in a timeless zone between the two personalities on the basis of their epistolary correspondences and writings. Through the anchorage of a narrator character Parekh compiles direct extract of relevant letters written from time to time by Gandhi and Tagore to be used as interlocutory dialogues-acting, reacting and counteracting with each other to achieve a dramatic verisimilitude as well as emerge as a document of debating opinions. The play with its experimental form and structure strikes a radical chord not only for emerging as a testimony of the dialectical debate but

in the process also memorializes a unique relationship while bequeathing posterity exemplary modes of handling dissent without discord.

Keywords: education, nationalism, *Charkha*, *swaraj*, non-cooperation, *atmashakti*.

Amidst the competitive populism of the present times where public debates often binge on abuse, anger and impropriety, the Gandhi-Tagore correspondence stands out as an exemplar of a civil debate and needs to be reviewed critically to give posterity a better picture of how disagreements are sorted out and dissents confronted without discord. This relationship that started flowering in the troubled times of India's independence crises stands out as a testimony of a unique bonding – their agreements and disagreements are interlaced with civility and mutual respect. Their regular correspondences, public addresses on several issues including nationalism, non-cooperation, the *Charkha* debate and the emancipation of the individual project them as adversaries who were contradicting and correcting each other not merely to mark their differences but to learn from each other and simultaneously strengthen their bond of love and mutual respect.

Shailesh Parekh's dramatic presentation *Gandhi vs Tagore* (2010) compiling the letters, essays and public addresses may be seen as testimonial interface complimenting this unique relationship while commemorating the modalities of encouraging a civil debate. This essay aims to study this dramatic presentation of Shailesh Parekh and contextualise the dialogues to underscore their points of agreements and disagreements that subtly also comment on the unique nature of the relationship shared by the two maestros.

Gandhi vs Tagore was first performed in 2009 by the Bangalore Little Theatre in Santiniketan in front of 'Shyamali' – the mud house in the "Udayan" premises to celebrate an immortal but baffling bonding that existed between Gandhi and Tagore. As Jawaharlal Nehru writes about this unique relationship, "Gurudeva and Gandhiji ... both were hundred percent India's children and inheritors, representatives and expositors of her age-long culture ... The surprising thing is that both of these men

with so much in common and drawing inspiration from the same wells of wisdom and thought and culture should differ from each other so greatly”. (Kripalani, 455)

Between 1915 and 1941 Tagore and Gandhi met in Santiniketan, Ahmedabad, Kolkata, Pune and Delhi and over three and a half decades, their turbulent opinions and feelings ebbed, flowed and evolved to a rather debatable friendship. This essay seeks to study the play and explore the nuances underscored by the playwright while trying to weave a dramatic representation of an imagined conversation in a timeless zone between the two personalities on the basis of their epistolary correspondences and essays. Through the anchorage of a narrator character Parekh compiles direct extract of relevant letters and essays written from time to time by Gandhi and Tagore to be used as interlocutory dialogues - acting, reacting and counteracting with each other to achieve a dramatic verisimilitude as well as emerge as a document of debating opinions. The play with its experimental form and structure strikes a radical chord not only for emerging as a testimony of the dialectical debate but in the process also memorializes a unique relationship while bequeathing posterity exemplary modes of handling dissent without discord and furnishing illustrations of a civil debate.



Photo: commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File: Gandhi-Tagore.jpg

The first visual impression one would have of these two intellectuals from different backgrounds are their striking sartorial differences. Gandhi is in his loin cloth and by contrast the poet dons his overflowing robes. The loin cloth would familiarize the leader of the people to his herd who were the impoverished crowd. Moreover, his rejection of the advocate's gown that he harped in his South Africa days is a conscious relegation of the hierarchy of the West to identify himself soulfully with the impoverished Indian commoner. In a way this attire strengthens his profile as a leader of the people. On the other hand, Tagore with his elite legacy of Zamindari was already the world poet winning accolades of the Nobel and his gear is in keeping with his belief in the confluence of the East and West. His flowing gowns signify his image of a globe-trotting bard-sage and testify his internationalism. The photographs testify this difference which also comment on their philosophy of life and reciprocate what they would represent for society.

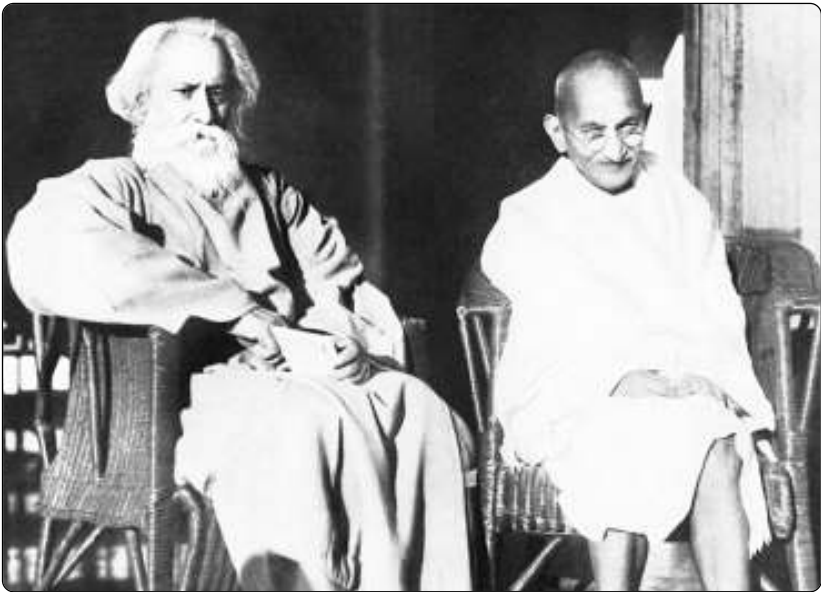


Photo: gandhi.gov.in/Gandhi-photo.html

Through the narrator figure Parekh establishes this difference of background at the very outset of the play:

The Tagore family was steeped in Indian thought and heritage and was westernized and enlightened enough to consider rational modern ideas and views which would liberate the mind from the bondage of rituals defying reason. Tagore's greatness lies in the fact that though he was one of the many whose personality was moulded by these three movements (of Literature, religion and politics) ...Contact with western thought and reason was yet to reach Gujrat except in the sphere of social reforms. Born in the family of a minister in one of the princely states, Gandhiji had an average, uneventful childhood and adolescence. His moral values were moulded by orthodox views of wrong and right, vice and virtue, sin and Samaritan deeds and his keen sense for the same was retained all through his life. (Parekh, 18)

Even before Gandhi gained popularity in the pre-independent realm of British India he has been a famous name with his iconoclastic activity in South Africa and Tagore was too well aware of it although they do not physically meet before 1915. What brings them together is the cause of the country - as the narrator epitomizes:

It was a period during which India found its identity and its downtrodden multitude was aroused from a stupor of centuries into the dawn of freedom. While Gandhiji is an undisputed architect of this awakening, Tagore was its 'great sentinel'...One believed in salvation through an individual, the other through the multitude. (Parekh, 19-20)

But their engagement with each other begins with the Phoenix boys being sent from South Africa to Tagore's ashrama in Santiniketan. Through the mediation and guardianship of C. F. Andrews the boys of the Phoenix school found shelter in Santiniketan from 4 November 1914 to 3 April 1915. Tagore conceived this to be an initiation of a new beginning: "allowing your boys to become our boys as well and thus, form a link in the sadhana of both of our lives". (Parekh, 22) Gandhi vouched for

his “close kinship with the *ashram* in Bengal”. (Bhattacharjee, 42)

But Tagore’s notion of the ashram school and that of Gandhi differed ideologically and Parekh cites that excerpt in his play text - Tagore’s observation of the Phoenix boys as he wrote to Andrews:

Phoenix boys ... have discipline where they should have ideals.
They are trained to obey ... These boys are in danger of
forgetting to wish for anything and wishing is the best part of
attainment. (Parekh 22)

Ashram culture as a combination of the Greek *akademe* and the ancient Indian *gurukul* system combined with the *brahmacharya ashram* have been approached differently by Tagore and Gandhi. While the ashram in Santiniketan with its promotion of the liberal arts and fine arts sought a wholistic development of the individual, Gandhi’s Phoenix school in Africa aimed at seeking formal education through the ideals of rigour, penance and sacrifice. This is also a pointer to the difference of perspective of education between the two thinkers – Tagore’s ideals are founded on liberalism and is based on the awakening of the inner soul – *atmashakti*, whereas Gandhi believed in the disciplinarian mode which is in keeping with his political leadership goals seeking the pragmatic purpose of political freedom. Subsequently however the Santiniketan-Sabarmati project too would bear the differences in their ideological stance but somewhere unite in their goals of seeking self-sustenance and self-independence. The narrator’s incorporation of the observations of Mirabehn bear witness to this observation. Parekh’s play text quotes Madeleine Slade’s views after her return from Santiniketan in 1929:

I now realize how Santiniketan and Sabarmati are two fair daughters of the same great motherland – both with exquisite beauties of their own – different to look upon outwardly, and yet with that fundamental likeness which only daughters of the same parent can bear. (Parekh, 56)

The Sabarmati and Santiniketan ideological divide was clearly evident in their January 1930 meet at Sabarmati. Through the narrative voice of Tagore Parekh presents this contradiction

Human life has its two aspects – one is discipline of truth and the other is fullness of expression. Sabarmati represents that discipline of truth, for Mahatmaji is born with the pure fire of truth ... Being a poet my mission is to inspire life's fullness of expression – and I hope Santiniketan carries that ideal in all its activities ... According to the Upanishad the reconciliation of the contradiction between *tapasya* and *Ananda* is at the root of creation – and Mahatmaji is the prophet of *tapasya* and I am the poet of *ananda*. (Parekh, 57)

On the issue of education and educational institution both Tagore and Gandhi expressed their discomfort but the mode was different. The narrator in the play points out

Gandhiji had advocated boycott of the British educational institutions. He had prescribed *satyagraha*, *charkha* and *swadeshi* as the pillars of his freedom movement. Tagore had objected to each one of these... The debate between them was on political issues but was elevated to a philosophical plane (Parekh, 29)

Unlike Gandhi who had been brought up before his departure for Britain for legal education in a comparatively tranquil and traditional native state, Tagore grew up amidst the vibrancy of British commerce and industry in the east – Calcutta. As a result he was exposed to the great achievements of western science and scholarship along with contemporaries like J. C. Bose and P. C. Ray though he himself hardly had any formal education. Moreover he could indulge in self-tutoring and proficiency with a wider notion of education primarily due to the intellectual ambience of JorasankoThakurbari in Calcutta; and such luxury or latitude of course was never available to Gandhi within the conservative and restricted privileges of his childhood ambience in Gujarat.

Tagore despised the organisation of society into a machine-like nation geared solely to production and exchange of material values as expounded in his 1917 essay on *Nationalism*. He was haunted by the image of the man in the grip of a technological obsession deformed and deprived of

his spiritual wholeness and creativity. Unlike Gandhi he believed that science too had a liberating influence on the human spirit. In his broadside against Gandhi's ideas on industry and science he defended the claims of western science in his essay "The Cult of the *Charkha*" (1925)

If the cultivation of science by Europe has any moral significance, it is in its rescue of man from outrage by nature, not its use of man as a machine but its use of the machine to harness the forces of nature in man's service. One thing is certain, that the all-embracing poverty which has overwhelmed our country cannot be remove by working with our hands to the neglect of science. Nothing can be more undignified than that man's knowing should stop dead and his doing go on forever. (Bhattacharjee,104)

Gandhi's view on western education and culture occupies a rather uncompromising opposition to western education and culture. Coming from someone who himself had the experience of a formal western education he attacks it aggressively. He combines western intellectual system and cultural ethos that together constitute modern western education to call it "civilisation". In *Hind Swaraj* he retaliates while justifying his severe disregard:

This civilisation takes note neither of morality nor of religion ... Civilisation seeks to increase bodily comforts and it fails miserably even in doing so. This civilisation is irreligious, and it has taken such a hold on the people in Europe that those who are in it appear to be half mad.... It is my deliberate opinion that India is being ground down under the English heel, but that of modern civilisation. (Gandhi, vi, 37)

While he was ready to accept the goodness of western science and education, Tagore was also at unease regarding imbibing the west and its education when it indulged in the dangers of renouncing the heritage of India under the spell of the grandeur of western civilisation. In *Towards Universal Man* he views:

The trouble is that as soon as we think of a university, the

idea of Oxford, Cambridge and a host of other universities rushes in and fills our mind. We then imagine that our salvation lies in selecting the best points of each, parched together in an eclectic perfection. We forget that European universities are organic parts of Europe (Das, 205)

Tagore was deeply committed to a universal ideal of humanity that will have space for diversity and he vehemently condemned all mindless borrowing as soul-killing. His metaphor of the tree in *Swadeshi* (1902) explains his disregard:

If a tree is adorned with foliage and flowers, that cannot survive the passing of day ... The manners and customs of a foreign land like an unfamiliar dress get ruffled and soiled in no time. The reason is that there is no history of growth behind them. They are unrelated, unconnected, and uprooted from the native soil. (Das, 12)

In his book *Towards Universal Man* Tagore elaborates this further:

If the cultivation of science by Europe has any moral significance, it is in its rescue of man from the outrage by nature – not in its use of man as a machine, but its use of the machine to harness the forces of nature in man's service... Science frees the human soul from the demeaning fear of nature and craven worship of its blind power, and it exorcises vain delusions, fancies and personal bias in a rigorous search for truth. (Das, 234-40)

For Tagore western science of his time had been harnessed to goals that shattered the integrity of man and specialised in knowledge of a particular type alone. But unlike Gandhi he did not dismiss it as irrelevant or inimical to life. Here lies the radical difference in their approach to decolonisation. Gandhi, who believed in the viability of the caste system, and the contentment derived from the handicrafts and posited man's inherent limitations, had a basically conservative though flexible outlook. Tagore believed in the positive benefits of change and man's power to mould his own destiny, though man at many times be horribly led

astray. For Tagore decolonisation did not mean rejection of the west, only an independence of mind freed from servility to western ideas and attitudes and as Hiren Gohain points out his approach was more like Franz Fanon. (Gohain, 26)

Historically tracing, amongst the projects of Gandhi Tagore was ideologically opposed to his idea of the *satyagraha*, burning of foreign cloth and the idea of the *charkha*. As Sabyasachi Bhattacharya rationalises the root of these differences:

...first, Tagore abhorred an instrumentalist view of *satyagraha*. He felt that politicians were using Mahatma's *satyagraha* as a stratagem in politics, as another "ingenious move in their political gamble. With their minds corroded by untruth, they cannot understand what an important thing it is that the Mahatma's supreme love should have drawn forth the country's love". They had converted Gandhi's message into a mindless *mantra* and thus they strengthened bigotry and inertia. Secondly, Tagore was unhappy with the call to boycott government schools, when there was no alternative educational system to impart better education ... Thirdly, Tagore was sceptical of the *charkha* and the burning of foreign cloth as the panacea for India's problems. And finally he was apprehensive that an isolationist obscurantism might develop in India, obsessed with the 'sins' and shortcomings of Western civilisation, failed to take a broader view of humanity as a whole. (Bhattacharjee, 7-8)

Tagore's standing against the *charkha* in his essay 'The Cult of the Charkha' hurls a direct contradiction to Gandhi's views as he felt that the rejection of foreign clothes will not suffice and alone propagate *swaraj* and it rather has to emerge from the individual and the collective community of society:

I am afraid of a blind faith on a very large scale in the *charkha*, in the country, which is so liable to succumb to the lure of short cuts when pointed out by a personality about whose moral earnestness they can have no doubt ... their

social habits...are a perpetual impediment and mental habits producing inertia of intellect and will ... if we have to get rid of this poverty which is visible outside, it can only be done by rousing our inward forces of wisdom and fellowship and mutual trust which makes for cooperation. (Bhattacharjee, 102-103)

Furthermore, Tagore asserts his opinion against the *charkha* in his essay “Striving for *Swaraj*”:

My complaint is, that by the promulgation of this confusion between *swaraj* and *Charkha*, the mind of the country is being distracted from *swaraj*. (Bhattacharjee, 118)

By contrast, Gandhi rejected Tagore’s view on the *charkha* and put forward his rationale for the *khadi*.

Parekh adapts this discourse and links it up with Tagore’s interest in the proliferation of education amongst the fellow countrymen. On the issue of education and educational institution both Gandhi and Tagore expressed their discomfort but the mode was of course different. The narrator in Parekh points out Gandhiji had advocated boycott of the British educational institutions. He had prescribed *satyagraha*, *charkha* and *swadeshi* as the pillars of his freedom movement. Tagore had objected to each one of these ... The debate between them was on political issues but was elevated to a philosophical plane (Parekh, 29)

Despite the ideological differences regarding Gandhi’s notion of the *charkha*, his reverence for the Mahatma is expounded elaborately when he winds up his argument :

It is extremely distasteful to me to differ from Mahatma Gandhi in regard to any matter of Principle or method. Not that from a higher standpoint, there is anything wrong in so doing; but my heart shrinks from it, ... Nothing is more wonderful to me than Mahatmaji’s great moral personality. In his divine providence has given us a burning thunderbolt of *shakti*. May this *shakti* give power to India, - not overwhelm her, - that is my prayer! ... the Mahatma’s field of work one which my

conscience cannot accept as its own ...How often have any personal feelings of regards strongly urged me to accept at Mahatma Gandhi's hands my enlistment as a follower of the *charkha* cult but as often have my reason and conscience restrained me, lest I should be a party to the raising of the *charkha* to a higher place than is its due, thereby distracting attention from other more important factors in our task of all-round reconstruction. (Bhattacharjee, 112)

Contrarily, Gandhi seeks the poet's help in this project as he regards the Poet as a sentinel warning us against the approaching enemies called Bigotry, Lethargy, Intolerance, Ignorance and other members of that brood. I do indeed ask the poet and the sage to spin the wheel as a sacrament. When there is war, the poet lays down the lyre ... The poet will sing the true note after the war is over. (Parekh, 37)

The playwright incorporates this excerpt from Gandhi's essay "The Great Sentinel" written in response to Tagore's "The Call for Truth" in 1921 to safeguard the poet's positionality vis-à-vis the nationalism discourse. For Tagore Gandhi was "Mahatmaji" and for Gandhi Tagore was always "Gurudeva"- the cordiality and reverence was always persistent.

Moreover when caustic critique was targeted at him Gandhi was prompt to defend and justify both their grounds – he wrote back in his essay, "The Poet and the *charkha*" (5 November 1925)

Dame Rumour has whispered that jealousy is the root of all that criticism ...Of what should the poet be jealous in me? Jealousy presupposes the possibility of rivalry. Well, I have never succeeded in writing a single rhyme in my life. There is nothing of the Poet about me. I cannot aspire after his greatness. He is the undisputed master of it. The world today does not possess his equal as a poet. My 'Mahatmaship' has no relation to the poet's undisputed position. It is time to realise that our fields are absolutely different and at no point

overlapping. The Poet lives in a magnificent world of his own creation – his world of ideas. I am a slave of somebody else’s creation – the spinning wheel ...The Poet is an inventor – he creates, destroys and recreates. I am an explorer and having discovered a thing I must cling to it ... Thus there is no competition between us. But I may say in all humility that we complement each the other’s activity.

In fact this summarises Gandhi’s rationale of seeking Tagore’s opinion on political decisions so as to enable him to fathom the mindset of the people through the lens of the poet’s opinions and also fathom its philosophical ramification. How relevant Tagore’s predictions were regarding this is easily understandable when we observe that in April 1919 just before the Jallianwala Massacre Gandhi wrote to Tagore requesting him a message on the ‘national struggle’. In response to this Tagore for the first time assigned him the title ‘Mahatma’ and as ‘a great leader of men’ pointing out that India will win freedom

When she can prove she is morally superior to the people who rule her by right conquest. She must willingly accept her penance of suffering, the suffering which is the crown of the great. (Bhattacharjee, 50)

Its immediate impact comes up the very next day with General Dyer’s bloody massacre at the Jallianwala Bagh on 13 April 1919, and the poet’s lines dedicated to the Mahatma reverberate as a haunting prelude to the mayhem:

Give me the supreme courage of love, this is
My prayer, the courage to speak, to do, to
Suffer at thy will, to leave all things or be left alone.
Give me the supreme faith of love, this is
My prayer, the faith of the life in death,
Of the victory in defeat, of the power hidden in
The frailness of beauty, of the dignity of pain

That accepts hurt, but disdains to return it. (Bhattacharjee, 51)

Thus, they have differed in their approaches of reconceiving social reconstruction but never violated the mutual realms of respect and fascination for each other and in times of vulnerability stood by each other's sides like the best of friends.

On the issue of nationalism Tagore and Gandhi's approach was different. He responded to Tagore's warning against the dangers of an 'isolated view of the country' with his clarification:

Our non-cooperation is neither with the system nor with the West. Our Non-co-operation is with the system the English have established, with the material civilization and its attendant greed and exploitation of the weak. (Bhattacharjee, 91)

He defines this kind of nationalism as 'humanitarian' and his prioritization of the political agenda is not to denigrate the poet but rather to face the reality: "The hungry millions ask for one poem – invigorating food. They cannot be given it. They must earn it." (Bhattacharjee, 91) It is on these terms that if Tagore is seen as the intellectual, Gandhi posits as the pragmatist. But to guide his pragmatism Tagore has often routed his advice on such terms that still are relevant and comments on the crisis underlying India even till date. One such is evident in Tagore's letter to Gandhi dated 30 September 1932. While being relieved at the abandonment of Gandhi's fast he strikes at the root cause of internal conflict in our country – the communal violence.

... a definite command from you will rouse the Hindu community to make a desperate effort to win over the Mahomedans to our common cause. It is more difficult of success than your fight against untouchability, for there is a deep-rooted antipathy against the Muslims in most of our people and they also have not much love for ourselves. But you know how to move the hearts of those that are obdurate, and only I am sure have the patient love that can conquer the hatred that has accumulated for ages. (Bhattacharjee, 135)

Gandhi pursued this challenge with his own tools. But till date what cuts a poor image about India is communal disquietude and Tagore detected the crisis much ahead of his time hoping Gandhi to be its redeemer. Caught between the cross fires of communal riots between the Hindu and Muslim communities in the country, the concept of idealizing the nation proved a rather challenging task and the country desisted from fulfilling the dreams of both the visionaries in their own ways.

Parekh's dramatic narrative employs the meeting of the two stalwarts in Sabarmati ashram in January 1930 to highlight the agenda for the future. The exchange represented in the play text signals their eagerness to seek freedom. Tagore was also voicing Netaji Subhas Bose's "parallel government" to Gandhi as a suggestive way of hinting at opening up the crisis Congress would be going to face when there would be differences within the party. It is suggesting the shape of things to come. Nevertheless, as Tagore opines, his faith in the Mahatma is undeniable:

No power on earth can prevent service, cleanliness, education of the country. Apart from you I do not know of anyone who can create such a service oriented organization... We need a person who enjoys the confidence of people. You do. In my opinion that is the real programme for freedom. (Parekh, 59)

It justifies the immense faith they possessed in each other. The bonding on the personal level is also very evident when we read Tagore's telegram after Gandhi's release from prison. On 5 February 1924 Tagore wrote "We Rejoice" (Bhattacharjee, 97) when he was admitted in Sassoon hospital, Poona and subsequently sends Andrews to keep him company while expiating his sincere concern "I cannot remain silent and inactive when I feel great anxiety at the unbounded prospect and freedom which other people have in wrecking your health and peace of mind" in his telegram dated 20 February 1924. (Parekh, 45) Parekh employs this excerpt to assert the intensity of emotional concern and personal connection between the two that was beyond the realm of professional relationship.

But with Gandhi's outright rejection of Europe, Tagore could never endorse his ideals. The non-cooperation movement and its logistics as

adopted by Gandhi was another major tool of contention between Tagore and Gandhi. Tagore has clarified his standpoint:

The idea of non-cooperation is political asceticism... it has at its back a fierce joy of annihilation which at best is asceticism, and at its worst is that orgy of frightfulness in which the human nature, losing faith in the basic reality of life, finds a disinterested delight in an unmeaning devastation as has been shown in the late war and no other occasions which came nearer to us. Non-cooperation in its passive moral form is asceticism and in its active form is violence. ... What irony of Fate is this that I should be preaching cooperation of cultures between East and West on ... (one) side of the ocean when the doctrine of non-cooperation is preached on the other side? I do not believe in the material civilisation of the West... I believe in the true meeting of the East and the West. (Bhattacharjee, 33)

Another outstanding meeting elaborately dramatised by Parekh in his play is the one when Gandhi had been fasting during his imprisonment at Yervada in Pune in 1930 and Tagore personally visited him to break his fast. This occasion was also witnessed by Vallabhbai Patel, Rajagopalachari, Rajendraprasad, Sarojini Devi and Kasturibai and as Tagore in the play voices, "Never had happened such an event in the human history..." (Parekh, 75) The way Gandhi is here described by Tagore is very interesting and comments on his reverence and admiration for him:

Mahatmaji's slender body was emaciated to a degree, his voice barely audible... Transcending the extreme rigours of his body this great manifestation of his invincible soul was before us moving us to profound admiration. I could hardly have fully realized how great is the strength of this frail man had I not come near to him like this. Today to millions of hearts in India has reached the message of this immortal spirit resting under the shadow of death's altar ... The obstruction of century old inertia had crumbled before it into dust' (Parekh, 74)

It underscores Tagore's opinion about Gandhi as a leader of the men. Simultaneously this was the admiration of a sincere friend – theirs were an unexpected friendship that flourished across many inequalities and hierarchical differences.

Parekh winds up his play by Gandhi and Tagore's combined choric recitation from Tagore's essay *Crisis in Civilisation* that upholds the priority of truth over all worldly pursuits: "By unrighteousness man prospers, gains what appears desirable, conquers enemies, but perishes at the root". (Parekh, 99) It underscores that despite their differences they were united in their worship for truth. Incorporation of this essay by Tagore at the fag end of his life to convey both of their thought processes for future progeny is a rather significant prediction of the flow of history through the geopolitical changes that was about to confront India.

Parekh's dramatic venture is to situate these two stalwarts within the time zone of contemporaneity and reminiscing through their differences and agreements a possible answer for posterity about how differences could be sorted out when there is selfless honesty about the goals. History repeats itself at every temporal juncture and the ideals worked out by both Gandhi and Tagore would prove its validity during political, social and spiritual times of crisis. As Romain Rolland commenting on the difference of these two great minds explained

...on the one side we have the spirit of religious faith and charity seeking to found a new humanity. On the other we have intelligence, free-born, serene and broad, seeking to unite the aspirations of all humanity in sympathy and understanding. (Saha, 9)

In a way this they seem to complement each other and are two essential polarities - their viewpoints could be collated for a desirable social change.

Parekh's theatrical production while commenting on the ideology of the two exponents of social change thus may be seen as a unique demonstration of how civil debates could propagate. Furthermore, it

brings out the relationship between Gandhi and Tagore as a testimony of a unique friendship that could be a lesson to us all – society is to be constructed on these ideals which would prioritise emancipation of the soul for the pursuit of the universal truth. Their methods and medium of pursuit were different but they sought the truth through Tagore's quintessential *atmashakti*.

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Hindi Responses to Badal Sircar's *Baaki Itihas* (1966): Translations and Production History

Tapu Biswas

Abstract

“*Baki Itihaas*” (meaning “Remaining History” or “Baaki Itihaas”) is a play written by the renowned Indian playwright Badal Sircar, exploring themes of middle-class life, societal issues, and the search for meaning through the story of a man who commits suicide. This was composed by the playwright in 1965 was first published in Bohurupee Patrika and later as book form. This play was first performed by the theatre group Bohurupee on 7 May 1967. This play was translated into Hindi in 1968 by Nemi Chandra Jain (1919-2005), a well-known Hindi poet, scholar and cultural figure and was published in 1969. This Hindi version was staged in different States of India. The main aims and objecties of this paper are to record the history performances and media responses of these performances.

Keywords: Translation, performances, publications, Hindi, *Baki Itihas* and *Evam Indrajit*.

Baki Itihas, Badal Sircar's one of the most significant plays was composed in 1965 was published in the Bohurupee Patrika later as a book form. It is an original play. This play was first staged by the theatre group Bohurupee on 7 May 1967, in Kolkata's New Empire Theatre under the direction of Shombhu Mitra. Just after one year of its Bengali production this play by Badal Sircar was translated into Hindi and produced and frequently staged in the same language. The translation history of this play goes back to 1968 when the first act of this play was published in the Hindi theatre journal *Natrang* in its July-

September (1968) issue. The translator was Nemi Chandra Jain (1919-2005), a well-known Hindi poet, scholar and cultural figure who had been a teacher in the National School of Drama for over twenty years. Jain himself said that the reason he had taken up the translation was because he admired Sircar as a writer who had “taken Indian playwriting to a new height” (my trans.)¹ Jain also recorded his hope that even his partial one act translation would “help the [Hindi] readers to form an idea of the level achieved by the play.”² Later, Nemi Chandra Jain went on to translate the whole of *Baki Itihas* and he finally published it in 1969. This first edition proved to be so successful that it was quickly sold out, with the publisher bringing out the second and third editions subsequently. “*Baki Itihas* has been repeatedly staged in Hindi and deeply appreciated” said the publisher’s note. “[There] is regular demand of his book! That is why the second edition is being brought out.”³ In a review of the translation the journal *Natrang* (April-June 1970) noted that in the play:

Basanti, a story writer in *Baki Itihas* has been under tension for about a month for not being able to think of a suitable plot for her story. Her husband Sarat suggests a plot relating to an incident of suicide. She starts writing. Sitanath loses everything to conceal a lie, even from his own wife Kanak. Unhappy over such behaviour of her husband Kanak leaves her home. While Sitanath gets ready to commit suicide Sarat finds all this unrealistic, and he goaded by Basanti himself starts writing a story on the same theme. In his story too Sitanath thinks of committing suicide. On being asked by Basanti what exactly would have made Sitanath commit suicide, Sarat begins to speculate. He spends sleepless nights. He feels that the ghosts of Sitanath reveals the falsity of his own life and makes him conscious of his own meaningless boring life.

This living and dying process latent in the play makes Sarat conscious of what has all alone being present in his mind. *Baki Itihas* is quite interesting from all point of view. As in *Evang (sic) Indrajit* the sensitive and serious philosophy of *Baki Itihas* related to the educated middle class.

The language of the translation is competent and fluent enough to make the latent pain properly felt.⁴

Baki Itihas was first performed in Hindi in Delhi by the drama group Amra in May 1968. Drama critic T.P. Jain commended the production in the Journal *Enact* (May 1968 Issue) and wrote:

The most outstanding feature of the production, however, was its technical perfection. The mosquito net drawing room designed by Sitanshu Mukherjee was not only pleasant it was most pertinent to the theme of the play. The lighting by him was also beautifully conceived and expertly executed - an altogether well done job⁵.

The play was staged a second time the same year (1968) in the auditorium of the All India Fine Arts and Crafts Society on October 19, 20, 21 and 26 by the theatre group Abhiyan under the direction of Rajendar Nath. The production created quite a stir with two critics N.S Jagannathan and T.P. Jain writing about their feelings about the play in two consecutive issues of the Journal *Enact* in April-May 1969. Jagannathan noted that the play possessed “a hundred merits - nice in irony, reverberating with overtones of the subtlest kind, structurally invented and ingenious.”⁶ However, the critic went on to criticise Sircar for “the probable reason of Sitanath’s suicide.”⁷ According to Jagannathan, the given reason for the suicide was “unconvincing in terms of dramatic logic, which is in one sense, far more permissive than real life though rather more exacting in another - assuming of course, that one can at all lay down the law about ‘truth’ in real life.”⁸ According to Jagannathan, “What Mr. Sircar presumably intends to be an existential agony of choices comes out as a sort of later day Byron. Sitanath’s all too easy despair has the mildewed appearance of a *fin-de-siecle* emotion.”⁹ Complaining that Badal Sircar had so generalised the sources of guilt that he has robbed the gesture of suicide of all point, this critic continued by saying:

I can understand Vietnam or Czechoslovakia oppressing one enough for one to kill himself in protest or even disgust. But if I am asked to take on the load of guilt of, say, the

Mahabharata war, I find the effort quite exhausting for reasons that are opposite of what Mr. Badal Sircar would have believed. I can be troubled by what man does to man; but I find it rather more difficult to be oppressed by a sense of personal responsibility for what man has done to man over the centuries. Yes, contemporaneity is the essence of the matter. By generalizing this sense of guilt, Badal Sircar is merely appearing to be indulging in the old cliché about history being the record of the ‘crimes and follies of mankind.’¹⁰

Jagannathan’s opinion about *Baki Itihas* was countered by T.P. Jain’s reaction to the play which was published under the heading “Realisation is All” in the May 1969 issue of *Enact*. Reacting to Jagannathan’s point in the April Issue of the same journal, Jain unambiguously stated that:

Most of us have taken this narration to imply a vicarious guilt of not realizing the responsibility by an individual towards what man has done to man. This is a total misrepresentation of the fact. The interpretation lies somewhere else. As I have already mentioned, the playwright’s concern is with life and death. After giving a starkly realistic description of middle-class life, he now tells about the three plausible ways of death. One is to actively accept death i.e. suicide. Another is death inflicted upon man by man, in an individual capacity or by collective effort. The incidents from history are examples of such death. Then comes the third one: that is to passively wait for death to come (as most of us do). To substantiate this kind of death, the personal history of each individual is described. This passive wait for death is synonymous with death-in-life. There is only an implicit suggestion on the part of the playwright that the active acceptance of death is far more preferable to the other two. But this should not be taken as a justification or commendation of suicide...¹¹

A further response to the play was published by Nemi Chandra Jain in *Enact* in its August-September 1969 issue. Jain notes that the translation of such of Badal Sircar’s plays as *Baki Itihas* and *Evam Indrajit* into

Hindi had set off a chain of translations into other languages as well. The play's translation, Jain noted, had "not only enriched the Hindi theatre, but also extended the repertoire of good plays in almost every active language theatre in the country, whether already established and flourishing or still struggling to find its feet."¹²

Away from Delhi, there was another production of *Baki Itihas* in Hindi in 1970 by the theatre group Pragati of Varanasi under the direction of S. Rajdeep. The next year in 1971 there were no less than three Hindi productions of the same play, the first directed by Prabhat Mandal, the second by Satyavrat Rout for the Artists' Association of Allahabad. The third performance was by the theatre group "Hastaakshar", a literary and cultural institution in Raipur, a town in Madhya Pradesh (though now in Chhatisgarh) mounted on 10 September 1971. This last production was jointly directed by Vimal and Vibhu Kumar. The character of Sitanath was played by Mobin Sham, while Kanak was played by Miss Parween, Mirza Masood appeared in the role of Sharad and Virendra Bharadwaj performed in the roles of the Old Man and Vijay. Basanti was played by Bharai Prakesh, Nikhil as Iqbal Khan and M.A. Badami as Vidhu Babu. The production was reviewed in the October, 1971 issue of the journal *Enact* and the reviewer Satish Awasthi took particular note of how the joint directors,

...remarkably broke away from the style of other leading directors of this play by underlying the inner conflict, emotional struggle and personality split of Sitanath and Sharad and not the resultant absurdity and meaningless of life. They showed skill and imagination in presenting the shadow of Sitanath on a white screen instead of in flesh and blood as allowed by the dramatist.¹³

There were two more productions of *Baki Itihas* in the Hindi language in 1972, and these were the Avantika production in Kolkata under the direction of Kishan Kumar, and the Hindi Natya Sangh production under the direction of Mahendra. Several other subsequent productions of the play in Nemi Chandra Jain's Hindi translation must also be noted. The first of these was the performance put up by the theatre group Anamika

in Kolkata in 1975 under Shiv Kumar Jhunjhunwala's direction. *Baaki Itihas* was again presented in Hindi at the Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur in 1973 under the direction of Bansi Kaul. The translation was the one by Nemi Chandra Jain which the drama critic Sunita Gandhi was to describe (in *Enact*, October 1973) as an effort "Rather poor and not suitable for acting." The reviewer however, was appreciative of the acting of Rakesh Verma in the twin roles of Sarad and Sitanath and Neerja Gupta in the roles of Kanak and Basanti. The other actors were Krishna Gandhi, Satish Srivastava, Rahul Pal and Jitendra Mehta who played the roles of Nikhil, Basudev and Vidhu Babu respectively. Gandhi, the reviewer, also took special note of Bansi Kaul's direction, describing it as,

...a departure from earlier productions by Sombhu Mitra (Calcutta), Satyadev Dubey (Bombay), and Rajender Nath (Delhi). Unlike earlier productions in which a stylized Sitanath is actually seen by the audience. Kaul's Sitanath is only heard through a battery of strategically deployed speakers. This created the illusion of introspection or a hallucination.¹⁴

This critic further commented on the sets and lights:

...bamboo set devised by Bansi Kaul [who] succeeded overshadowing the stage action and [made] the artistes appear to be prisoners of their circumstances. By intelligent use of tonal lights, Kaul, who also designed the lighting of the play was able to maintain undercurrents of pain, misery and immense suffering¹⁵.

Nemi Chandra Jain's translation of *Baaki Itihas* was once again used for a production of the St. Stephen's College Shakespeare Society in Delhi in 1980. The production of the play was directed by Raju Sharma and the different roles were played by Chandra Kishore Misra as Sharad, Monica Capil as Vasanti, Pradeep Srivastava as Basu, Sangeeta Luthra as Kanak I and Maitreyi Bordia as Kanak II. The character of Vijay was played by Amit Jha and that of Vidhubhusan by Praveen Jha. Arvind Singh assayed the role of Nikhil, while Alok Singh performed as Agantuk and Raghuvendra Madhav appeared as the Old Man. Sitanath I, II and

III was performed by Raju Sharma. A Brochure was published on the occasion of the performance, and in it the director explained that *Baki Itihas* was a play “about an average middle-class couple engrossed in a world of their own. A casual conversation leads them into a fictional analysis of another person’s suicide.”¹⁶ This perception of the director about the theme of *Baki Itihas* is foregrounded by a quotation from the French existentialist thinker Albert Camus: “There is but one truly serious philosophical problem and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy.”¹⁷ According to the director the central “character finds it difficult to rationalize the mere existence of wars, inequality, injustice and starvation. He cannot reconcile the oddities of the social set up to his own world that has clarity and hope, vision and logic.” Yet one contrives “to live and seek reason within the existing inconsistencies. The feeling in the end is not one of despair but one of suspended animation.” The production was reviewed in *The Times of India* in its 6 September 1980 issue under the caption “Commendable play by Collegians” and the reviewer had special praise for the director Raju Sharma who also performed as Sitanath. “Sharma has come a long way from his first appearance on the College Stage in his first year” wrote the reviewer. “His acting and directing of *Baki Itihas* puts him in the front ranks of the student theatre workers. What marks the production as outstanding as compared to college productions and the usual fare dished out by most amateur groups in Delhi is its good timing, teamwork, and the sincerity of effort of the entire cast and understanding of the play.”¹⁸

Also in 1980 was performed Nemi Chandra Jain’s Hindi rendering of *Baki Itihas* by the Mumbai group ‘Ank’ under the direction of Dinesh Thakur. Next, the play was staged by the National School of Drama, Delhi in 1981. The director was Shankhya Ibotombi. In the same year, 1981, Bansi Kaul again directed the play in Lucknow with the group Darpan. Then, from 12-15 October 1982, *Baki Itihas* in its Hindi avatar was staged at the Gandhi Memorial Hall at Sri Ram College of Commerce, Delhi. The director of this production was Shekhar Baishnabi and the actors included Mrigank Ojha as Sharad, Ami Meheta as Vasanti, Rakesh

Sharma as Vasu, Aradhana Kohli and Alka Avtar as Kanak I and Kanak II, Sanjoy Tandon as Nikhil, Rajeev Ahuja as Sitanath, Arvind Malhotra and A.P. Ramabhardran as Buddha, Sandeep Sachdeva and Rajiv Malik as Vijay, Amitabh Gupta as Sitanath II and Rajiv Mallik and Sandeep Sachdeva as Vidhubhushan. The performance was reviewed in the Delhi edition of *The Statesman* dated 15 October 1982. Given the fact that it was a student's production, the reviewer took note of the fact that "The production was reasonably neat and smooth, even if the interpretation of the play tended to be superficial, with a very loud and insufficiently modulated speech pattern and insensitiveness to pauses and silences." Nevertheless, the reviewer praised the young actors for not only "capturing the spirit of the play, but also for imbuing it with an energy which made the performance enjoyable."¹⁹ Special praise was reserved for Mrigank Ojha as Sharad and Ami Mehata as Vasanti.

In 1984, there were two more productions of *Baki Itihas* (as translated by Nemi Chandra Jain). The first of these was by the theatre group Bhartendu under direction of Raj Biseria in Lucknow, and the second yet another performance by the group Darpan under the direction of Bansi Kaul. There were two more productions in 1986 in different parts of India. In Patna (Bihar) the Kala Sangam group enacted the play under the direction of Satish Anand. In the city of Alwar, Devdeep directed the play for the theatre group Sanket.

Then, in 1987 or five years after Ank's production of *Baki Itihas* in 1982, the same group (and director) staged the play on 16 February at the Manzar Theatre Hall in Mumbai. A repeat performance was held in the same month (February 1987) in Delhi in the Mansingh Theatre at the Pragati Maidan under the sponsorship of the Trade Fair Authority of India. The main roles were played by the director Dinesh Thakur himself and his wife Meenakshi Thakur, with Vijayan Nair and Ananth Mahadevan in supporting roles. In her review published in the newspaper *Hindustan Times* on 23 February, 1987 theatre reviewer Kavita Nagpal wrote that the performance was so compelling that "even the comparatively somber *Baki Itihas* held the audience captivated for the whole duration of the play. Clever lighting and flashes of good acting added to a finely honed script made entertaining theatre."²⁰

Yet another performance of *Baki Itihas* in Hindi was staged in 1988 at the NSD (National School of Drama) New Delhi under the direction of Anita Udgata. Later in January 1992 the students of Sri Ram College put up another performance of the same play at the Sri Ram Center. The production was directed by Kishan Kant, the music was scored by Saurabh Sukla, the set was designed by Gurmukh Singh and the lights were by Girdhari. The central character Sharad was enacted by Manoj Kumar Tyagi, and the roles of Vasanti and Kanak were taken up by Kanika Dang and Reeta. The drama critic P.C. Sircar of the *Evening News* in his review under the caption "A Play Worth Remembering" published on 17 January 1992 had special words of praise for Nemi Chandra Jain's translation. "The choice of words and dialogues of the translation into Hindi," he wrote, "appealed as much as the original Bengali script and [was] written with equal spirit."²¹

Thereafter in 1995, *Baki Itihas* was again performed by the final year students of the National School of Drama (New Delhi) under the direction of Rabin Das. It was enacted over 3-6 August 1995 at the Aiwan-E-Ghalib auditorium, Delhi.

A production brochure was published to mark the performance, and this document is important for it throws light on its young director's response to the genius of Badal Sircar. As Rabin Das puts it "Working on this play has been very rewarding because *Baki Itihas* offers an interesting understanding of the transition to Badal Sircar's later phase of playwriting. The tendencies are quite emergent in this play." About his own contribution Das said:

I only have attempted to extend and explain the inherent images of the play. We have tried to go along the lines of Badal Sircar as a playwright and as a theatre director, who pioneered in the early seventies, a new theatre movement in India: An activist we cannot but salute.²²

Even more importantly however, the brochure contains a write-up by Nemi Chandra Jain, the Hindi translator of *Baki Itihas*, highlighting his own response to Sircar and his play, and to his own art of translation. Beginning by noting that "*Baki Itihas* is a fascinating play which in many

ways is not only the best work of Badal Sircar, but also a landmark in new dramatic writing in our country, its theme raises some basic social and moral issues of human existence and individual's responsibility for the evils of modern society".²³ Jain goes on to appreciate the fact that "[it] is also a very imaginatively crafted play, with an unusual juxtaposition of styles. Its first two acts verge on obvious melodrama, seemingly unconnected but very subtly suggesting the main theme while the third is a kind of fantasy with an interesting mix of didactic argument. The language of each act has a separate flavor and shows the playwright's control over his medium."²⁴ Following upon this, Jain notes too that since "[d]ifferent regions and languages of our country are a kind of variation of the common theme of Indian sensibility, culture, social structure and creative expression,"²⁵ it is never easy to translate the "total flavor." Directly confronting the challenge faced by a translator attempting to translate a dramatic text from one Indian language to another, from Bengali to Hindi in his own case, Jain rightly notes that without a specific sensitivity to local "verbal and physical expressions", and to "specific theatre traditions and conventions," no translation may amount to being anything else apart from being "a mere verbally faithful transposition, without the colour and vibrance of the original."²⁶

This NSD (National School of Drama) production was extensively reviewed. The most extensive of these appeared in *The Times of India* (Delhi edition) on 11 August 1995 under the title "NSD brings *Baki Itihas* alive." The writer of this review, Javed Mallick, praised the director Rabin Das for his "boldness and creativity in approaching the text" and for injecting his production with a "tremendous visual energy". Mallick also lauded it for "employing a number of imaginative strategies," widening the "the scope of the play."

The production visualises all that is merely verbalised in the play. Using the images of the larger external world of history and society recurrently and allowing its "visual chorus" to constantly weave in and out of main performance areas, it abolishes all distinction between the private and the public spaces. In fact, the performance is so designed that the interior of the protagonist's house where the main action in Sircar's

text is located, is left spatially undefined and undemarcated. Furthermore, the performance often spills over into the hall, thereby dismantling the distinction between the stage and the auditorium as well.

Another interesting strategy that Das uses is to duplicate the action of each of the two stories (two imaginary reconstructions of the story of Sitanath's suicide) within the play's overarching story. In each, there are two Sitanaths and two Kanaks.

Their speeches are sometimes simultaneous and synchronised, sometimes complementary to one another and sometimes spaced so that one sounds like the echo of the other. In the first version, the two actors playing the same character are addressed identically, are given identical movements and, often gestures. Even the sound of their voices is similar. The second story offers a variation, so that this time the costumes, movements, positions and voices of the two are kept distinct. Most interestingly, in the last sequence, the plays protagonist finds himself confronted with not one, nor even two, but four Sitanaths and four Kanaks (two from Sharad's version and two from Basanti's).

One obvious reason for this strategy is, of course, to accommodate the large class of students in a play which has a small number of roles and can be played by a cast of just five actors. But its value goes well beyond the pragmatic and has the effect also of emphasising the commonness, rather than the uniqueness, of the play's central experience. Moreover, this strategy, along with the use of larger than life effigies, parodic repetition of certain lines from text, and a whole range of symbolic actions and images, enhances the play's theatrical vigour and makes it more interesting in performance.²⁷

In another review published in *The Hindu* on the same day (August 11 1995) the drama critic Romesh Chander drew attention to the content of the play with the headline to his article "The Enormous Burden of History." "*Baki Itihas* is not only a pioneer but also a landmark in new

dramatic writing that started in the mid 60s in the country,” wrote Chander. “The play is most innovatively structured with the first two acts treated more of less melodramatically and the final act a captivating mix of fantasy and the playwright’s concern against oppression and persecution of mankind.” According to this critic,

we have the playwright reminding us of the two sides of the history of mankind: our conventional existence on the one hand and on the other our indifference to the rest of history of man’s oppression as manifested in power struggle, Hiroshima, fundamentalism *et al.* Sitanath shares the human guilt and sees no way out and so kills himself. Sharad finds no answer to Sitanath’s or his other self’s questions and as he also gets ready to commit suicide, a friend rushes in to tell him of his promotion. He is saved, but as he says, the rest of his life he will live under the burden of the rest of the history – *Baki Itihas*.²⁸

The theme of the play was also discussed by the drama critic of *The Statesman* in his August 14 1995, review of the production. Badal Sircar’s play, according to this reviewer, gives “a flashback of history and oppression from the building of the pyramids, persecution of early Christians in Rome, Auschwitz, Hiroshima and Vietnam.” The central character Sharad who is a lecturer is confronted with the question of how he can react to this history. As the reviewer notes,

His private self lays forth the futility of even trying to correct matters and goads Sharad to attempt suicide, preparations for which are aborted by an acquaintance turning up unexpectedly with news of a promotion for Lecturer. Sharad is left unable to reconcile his craving for security and the immensity of oppression in history.²⁹

In yet another review of the production which appeared at the *Hindustan Times* of August 15, 1995 the newspaper’s drama critic Sushma Chadda summed up the theme of *Baki Itihas* under the caption “Sircar’s New Theatre.” “Oppression, killings, riots have continued from the beginning of society to modern times and will continue. No one can

stop them. This is the theme of Badal Sircar's *Baki Itihas* presented by final year students of NSD at Aiwan-e Ghalib auditorium recently," wrote Chadda.

The play has special significance in contemporary times. The powerful script coerces the audience to explore their inner psyche by posing the question, "What is our responsibility for the events of our times? If the vision of history is dismal, present is a continuation and there is no hope for future. We have inherited violence and are perpetuating it."³⁰

The reviewer went on to note that Sircar in *Baki Itihas* had "blended diverse styles. In the imaginative stories by Sharad and his wife there is melodrama, fantasy in Sharad's encounter with Sitanath, family interludes, pedantic arguments between Sharad and Sitanath, and comic scenes with friend. Praising Sircar for having pioneered a new dramatic writing both in theme and style,"³¹ Sushma Chadda has also a word of praise for Nemi Chandra Jain's Hindi translation. The Hindi playwright, according to her, "retained the sensitivity, creativity and flavor of language of the original script"³².

The National School of Drama production was lavishly mounted, given its larger production budget and staging at the National Capital of India. What is even more significant is the fact that the play was staged on much smaller budgets in even many lesser towns of the country. One such production of *Baki Itihas* that used the text translated into Hindi by Nemi Chand Jain, was mounted in the town of Bhagalpur in Bihar on 24 November 1996 by the "Paridhi" theatre group under the direction of Uday and Sarat Chandra. The actors who performed in this production were Probir, Sarita, Lalan, Rahul, Sabita, Sanjoy, Mritunjoy, Bikram and Sunil.³³

Thereafter a few months later on 16 March 1997, *Baki Itihas* was again staged in Hindi in the town of Gazipur in Uttar Pradesh at the Saraswati Shishumandir Prangan Raijang, under the direction of Dr. Siv Murat Singh. Ramesh Patel performed in this production as Sarat, Agantuk and Bidhu Bhushan, Manjula Singh appeared as Basanti and Kanak I and II, and Biswanath Sharma Babu enacted the roles of Basu or Bura, while

Sudhin Nigam appeared as Sitanath I, II and III. Coincidentally, on the same day, that is on 16 March 1997, there was another production of *Baki Itihas* put on in Udaypur, Rajasthan by Madhyam theatre group under the direction of Shivmurat Singh.

Baki Itihas was once again staged by the members of the IPTA in Jawaharlal Nehru University in 2009. In the next year in March 2010 the drama group Shradhha of Delhi University's Shradhananda College mounted a production of the play on the occasion of the International Women's Day and the play was enacted to give the message that voices needed to be raised all in order to assert the rights of the marginalized, particularly women, in society. This production was directed by Bipul Pachouri and it was co-sponsored by the Hindi language daily *Dainik Jagaran* and *Jagaran Sathi*. The following year in November 2011, *Baki Itihas* was again performed, this time in Patna, the capital of the State of Bihar. The play was given a special recognition as it was chosen to be shown as the curtain raiser for a four-day theatre festival inaugurated at the Kalidas theatre hall. The director Subhas Krishna tried to show that Sircar's play not only held up a mirror to the state of Indian society, but also showed that history is made equally by the common man as well as by important personalities, emperors and rulers. That the popularity of *Baki Itihas* all over India did not abate even in later times is evidenced by its performance by the students of the Electrical Engineering Department of the Indian Institute of Technology, Benares on 10th November 2013. The play was directed by Vandan Pokhariya, and the cast included Archit Seth as Sharad, Prakarsh Sharma as Seetanath, Surabhi Pathak as Kanak, Jyoti Sinha as Vasanti, Vandan Singh as Vijay, Ashish Dugar as Kanak's Father, Devrat Singh as Nikhil, Kanishk Goyal as Vasudev, Harshal Agrawal as Vudhu Babu, Kaushik Kumar Mahato as Aagantuk. A production brochure published for another production of the play staged on 17 May 2015 at the Vasuki auditorium in the Lodhi Institutional Area of New Delhi noted in part that *Baki Itihas* is the timeless story of our times past, times present and times in the future.

[It] is the history of mankind, that history which is more profound than the history of any single individual. It is beyond everyday cares and relationships. It is this history, which

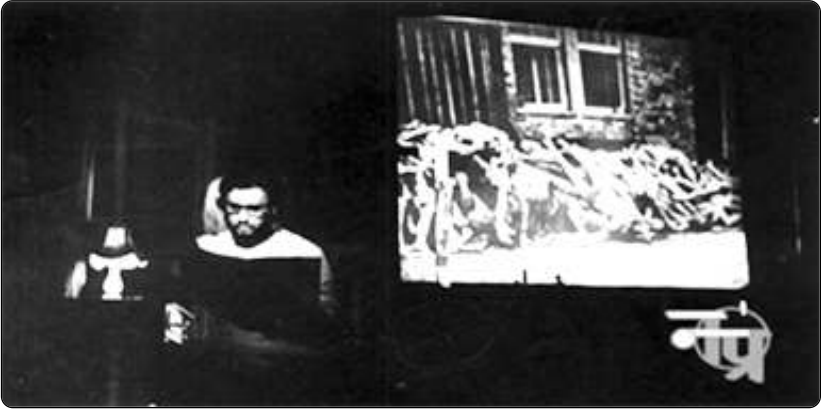
shapes the future of mankind, that which shapes the present world that we live in, that which dictates what we live for and that which gives meaning to our existence. Is it a story that we are proud of? Is it one that can inspire us our beautiful tomorrows?"

And the note continues:

Sharad and Vasant are intrigued by the suicide of a chance acquaintance. A lazy Sunday morning is the perfect time to give imagination full reign and spin stories over endless cups of tea. What emerges is effective, believable, and plausible but is it the truth? That inevitable human failing soon overtakes their need to know the truth. But the truth is often unpalatable; it can lead to hopelessness, despair and even suicide...

The play was directed by Sunil Rawat, and the different roles were played by Vikramaditya, Praveen, Dharmender, Pooja Pathak, Jatin Dogra, Anubhava Dixit, Vinod Juyal, Prem Prakash, Rehman Khan, Naseem, Rashmi Singh, Aqsa.

Apart from all the productions of *Baki Itihas* in Hindi detailed above, there is also some evidence of at least ten other performances of the play in the towns and cities of Baroda, Sagar, Varanasi, Gwalior, Ujjain, Lucknow, Udaipur and Delhi. In Baroda, the members of the Amateur Drama Club mounted the production under the direction of Madhukar Pandit. In Sagar, a town in Madhya Pradesh, the theatre group Prayag produced the play under the direction of Kamala Shankar. The group Natya Parishad staged the play in Varanasi under the direction of Neel Kamal. In Gwalior there were two performances of the play, the first directed by Purushottam Aggrawal for the theatre group Rangshilp, and the second staged by the members of a group named Artistes' Combine. Dharendra Kumar also directed the play for the theatre group Hillol Sangam in the town of Ujjain (Uttar Pradesh). In Lucknow, Laxman Verma produced the play with the actors of the group Lacrees. In Udaipur (Madhya Pradesh), the theatre group Seva Mandir put up the play under the direction of Shail Choyal.



A Scene from *Baki Itihas* in Hindi, Translator: Nemi Chandra Jain, Group: Ank, Maharashtra. Director: Dinesh Thakur, Ananat Mahadevan.

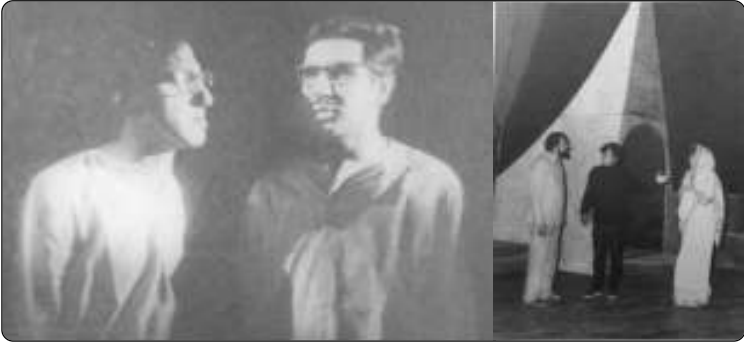


A scene from the play *Baki Itihas* staged by SRC acting course student



A scene from the play *Baki Itihas* staged by SRC acting course student

Theatre International



Saksham Theatre presents “*Baki Itihas*” in Hindi at Vasuki Auditorium, 17 May 2015.
Scenes from *Baki Itihas*, Direction: Rajinder Nath & *Evam Indrajit*, Direction:
Shymanand Jalan



Various pictures of *Baki Itihas* staged by National School of Drama

** This paper is developed with the help of my book *Badal Sircar* published under Makers of Indian Literature published by Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi in 2024

Footnotes

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30. Sushma Chadha's report in *The Hindustan Times*, 15 August 1995 under the caption "Sircar's New Theatre."
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Unveiling Oppression: Marxist Critique and Subaltern Resistance in Utpal Dutt's *Hunting the Sun*

Bidisha Munshi

Abstract

Utpal Dutt's *Hunting the Sun* is a Marxist critique of the socio-religious power structures that have persisted from ancient India into contemporary society. Through a Brechtian framework, Dutt exposes how these structures rely on myth, tradition, and suppression of knowledge to maintain dominance. His play challenges authoritarian regimes that silence dissenting voices by exploring the historical manipulation of Hindu texts to suppress lower castes and marginalized communities. *Hunting the Sun* becomes a powerful commentary on subaltern voices through the narrative of Kalhan, a Buddhist monk, and his disciple Indrani, who both oppose the despotic rule of Samudragupta, symbolizing resistance against the subjugation of intellectual freedom and social justice.

Keywords: Marxist Critique, Subaltern Resistance, Caste Hierarchy, Intellectual Freedom, Epic Theatre

Utpal Dutt was not merely a playwright; he was a revolutionary. He strongly believed in the populist theatre. He believed that theatre could never exist without the acceptance of the masses. He used his works as platforms to challenge authoritarianism and oppressive systems that manipulate knowledge and truth to sustain their power. *Suryasikâr*, translated into English by the dramatist himself as *Hunting the Sun*, was published in Epic Theatre in 1972. It is a significant work in Dutt's repertoire, which examines the ways in which political authority and religious orthodoxy combine to suppress scientific knowledge, using

myth and tradition as tools to maintain control. This paper seeks to observe how *Hunting the Sun* utilizes Marxist ideology and epic theatre techniques to confront historical and ongoing systems of caste-based and religious oppression in India.

Being a Marxist intellectual, Utpal Dutt understood that many of India's societal problems, such as the rigid hierarchies of caste and gender, originated in ancient past and persisted into the present. *Hunting the Sun* is a prime example of this realization. The play deconstructs the so-called "golden ages" of Indian history, particularly the Gupta era, by exposing the underlying brutalities often hidden beneath cultural achievements. Through the Marxist lens, Dutt critiques the myth of cultural grandeur, illustrating how the Brahminical patriarchy during the Gupta age was instrumental in nurturing the ideologies that feed modern communalism. He foregrounds subaltern voices to connect past struggles with contemporary efforts toward self-assertion. *Hunting the Sun* thus serves as a profound critique of the glorified past, highlighting the ongoing relevance of these issues in modern India. According to Uddalak Dutta,

Dutt has . . . often taken recourse to imagined history. For example, the character Samudragupta in *Suryasikâr* (*Hunting the Sun*, 1971) was not the historical emperor, the described feud between him and the Buddhist priest Kalhan never took place. Rather, the events reflected the controversy surrounding Galileo's infamous recantation in seventeenth-century Italy. However, *Suryasikâr* is not a mere figment of the dramatist's imagination. It highlights issues of caste, race, class, and power which were relevant to the history of the country during the era of the Gupta emperors and continue to be relevant today. In this way, Dutt dexterously blends myth and history. (35)

Utpal Dutt's dramatic techniques, frequently drawing on the principles of epic theatre, served as a powerful instrument in his fight against authoritarianism and intellectual oppression, challenging audiences to critically engage with power structures and question the status quo.

This play aims to awaken the consciousness of the oppressed. Inspired by Brechtian theatre, Dutt uses the play to challenge societal hierarchies, focusing on power, knowledge, and revolution. The play is set in a historically rich context but addresses universal themes, making it relevant for contemporary social struggles. Dutt employs techniques of epic theatre, particularly alienation and didacticism, to challenge his audience's passive consumption of the narrative. Involving the audience in critical thought, he forces viewers to question the social and political structures around them. Like Brecht, Dutt rejects emotional identification and instead encourages intellectual engagement. The play is less about the individual fate of characters and more about the larger societal structures that shape them. The didactic nature of the dialogue, especially Kalhan's scientific explanations, serves to educate the audience as much as it does the characters within the play. At the heart of *Hunting the Sun* is the conflict between the existing power structures and the pursuit of enlightenment. It is set in an empire that mirrors ancient India, ruled by Samudragupta, a king obsessed with maintaining his authority through controlling intellectual discourse. Kalhan, the Buddhist monk, and his disciple Indrani stand for the power of knowledge, challenging the status quo. The play captures the age-old tension between those who hold power and those who seek to dismantle it through reason and enlightenment. Samudragupta represents the authoritarian figurehead who uses religious orthodoxy to maintain his power. His obsession with hunting the sun symbolizes the absurd quest for control over knowledge and truth. On the other side stands Kalhan, whose scientific truth clashes with the religious and political orthodoxy of the empire. His quest for scientific truth mirrors Enlightenment ideals, opposing the myths and dogmas that bind society to outdated religious narratives. His arguments for a heliocentric model of the universe are symbolic of the Enlightenment ideals that Dutt advocated—ideas of reason, progress, and intellectual freedom. This clash is not merely between two worldviews but between two futures: one that embraces science and truth, and another that clings to superstition and ignorance.

In fact, Kalhan embodies the voice of reason and intellectual defiance against oppressive socio-political structures. He is deeply committed to

his beliefs and is willing to face persecution to uphold his pursuit of truth. For him, knowledge is a means of liberation, a way to free individuals from the chains of superstition and blind faith that the ruling class uses to maintain its power. Dutt's Marxist ideology is deeply embedded in the narrative of *Hunting the Sun*. The rebellion against the king's tyranny can be seen as a metaphor for class struggle. Kalhan's quest for knowledge is not an individual pursuit but a collective effort to free society from the chains of superstition and oppression.

The Emperor's ministers, such as Basubandhu and Virupaksha, represent the religious orthodoxy that opposes any deviation from established dogma. They dismiss Kalhan's arguments not because they lack merit, but because his ideas undermine the ideological foundations that sustain their power. Kalhan's philosophy advocates that there is no afterlife, no heaven, no sin, and no virtue—only the tangible world of man and science. These beliefs put him in direct opposition to the Empire's use of religion as a tool for subjugation.

BASU. . . . Your materialistic philosophy—a shrewd concoction of the Sunyavad and Vijnavad of the last century—will undermine the foundations of Brahminical religion and even unleash a slave revolt.

KALHAN. You call yourself a scientist and yet have no compunction in disseminating lies in the service of the state? You will deny the truth? (Deshpande 610)

Indrani, Kalhan's disciple and surrogate daughter, plays a crucial role in challenging the Emperor's power. The Emperor tries to use her to falsely accuse Kalhan of immoral behaviour, hoping to discredit him. However, Indrani, depicted as an intelligent and fearless Shudra woman, refuses to comply. Her resilience and refusal to betray Kalhan symbolize the resistance of marginalized communities against oppressive powers. Despite being tortured, she remains steadfast, emphasizing the struggle for intellectual freedom and the assertion of self-worth in a society that severely limits the rights of women and lower-caste individuals.

Indrani's fight to spread the truth that the Earth is round, despite the

opposition from traditional forces, symbolizes the clash between reason and power. Dutt uses her character to show how knowledge can be revolutionary. The consequences Indrani faces—her imprisonment and ultimate death— demonstrate the lengths to which oppressive regimes will go to maintain their authority. This dynamic is a clear reflection of Dutt’s critique of bourgeoisie power and the marginalization of the oppressed.

The parallels between the emperor’s control over knowledge and the control of capital in a Marxist framework are quite evident. Just as the bourgeoisie suppresses the proletariat through control of the means of production, Samudragupta seeks to suppress the populace through control of intellectual discourse. Dutt’s Marxist critique is most clearly expressed in the character of Samudragupta, who manipulates both political and intellectual discourse to maintain his grip on power. His rejection of Kalhan’s scientific truth, even while acknowledging its validity, is an act of political self-preservation. This mirrors how the bourgeoisie, in Marxist theory, suppresses the proletariat by controlling the means of production—in this case, the means of intellectual production. Samudragupta says,

We must first systematically destroy Kalhan’s reputation, and so anticipate and obviate the protests of the country’s scholars. We shall not engage Kalhan in astronomical disputation, because we shall inevitably lose. No, we shall deliver a flank attack and take him by surprise, to speak militarily again. You will therefore be our star witness, and you will assassinate his character. (Deshpande 617)

This passage reflects a calculated strategy by Samudragupta’s regime to dismantle Kalhan’s influence and credibility, not by directly challenging his ideas, but through a targeted character assassination. The speaker suggests that engaging Kalhan in a scholarly debate on astronomy would be futile because of Kalhan’s expertise and the strength of his arguments. Acknowledging their likely defeat in intellectual discourse, they decide to undermine him through more insidious means—attacking his personal reputation rather than his ideas. This manipulation of public opinion to

suppress dissenting voices reflects the play's broader critique of authoritarian regimes, which often prioritize control over intellectual honesty. By highlighting this strategy, Dutt critiques how power structures attempt to stifle revolutionary or challenging ideas through unethical and deceptive tactics rather than through genuine dialogue. However, Dutt also suggests that knowledge, like revolutionary consciousness, cannot be suppressed indefinitely. The spread of scientific truth and enlightenment, as represented by Kalhan's disciples, continues even after Kalhan's death.

MADHU. . . No, all is not lost. Your ideas live. . . .Your science lives. . . .The world will find out the truth, if not today, then tomorrow, a century, a millennium later. And people will know, a courageous old man once lit a lamp to dispel the darkness of the mind. (Deshpande 650)

Kalhan epitomises Antonio Gramsci's concept of the "organic intellectual," as he uses his scientific knowledge and spiritual wisdom to challenge Brahminical and authoritarian oppression from within the oppressed classes. Unlike traditional intellectuals, Kalhan engages directly with the people, cultivating critical thought and inspiring resistance against hegemonic structures. His teachings and defiance illustrate the transformative role of knowledge in liberating marginalized communities, aligning with Gramsci's belief that intellectuals must actively dismantle oppressive ideologies to achieve societal change (Gramsci 55).

Dutt's critique of religion aligns with his Marxist ideology, which views religion as the "opium of the people"—a tool used by the ruling class to subjugate the oppressed. Dutt uses historical and religious references to uncover subjugated voices, especially those of lower castes and women, exposing how ancient Hindu texts were manipulated by ruling classes to maintain their power and suppress dissent. He connects these oppressive practices to contemporary communal violence and caste discrimination, influenced by his own experiences with Partition and communal clashes, emphasizing that fundamentalism serves as a tool for continued class dominance and silencing of lower castes.

In this play, Utpal Dutt focuses on the systemic degradation and dehumanization of slaves and women in ancient India, capturing their exploitation under oppressive social and religious structures. This portrayal serves to emphasize the intersection of caste, gender, and power dynamics in a way that critiques the historical subjugation of marginalized groups. Dutt reveals the plight of Shudras, who were subjected to slavery and treated as subhuman. This is evident from the play's opening sequence, where Madhukarika and her son Veerak, both Shudras, are sold publicly, an act that starkly illustrates their societal degradation. The character of Suryavarma epitomizes the brutal Brahminical bias of the era, viewing slaves as similar to animals. This perspective reflects how caste-based discrimination was not just accepted but legally sanctioned by scriptures. For example, texts dictated that Shudras had no right to education or personal autonomy, with severe punishments for transgressions, effectively stripping them of their humanity.

Women, especially those of lower castes, faced layered oppressions. Madhukarika's ordeal as she is publicly stripped for inspection signifies the violation of both caste and gender. Her suffering echoes the brutal realities of Dalit women in contemporary India, who are still often targeted by caste-based violence. Dutt underscores this intersectional vulnerability, presenting Madhukarika as an embodiment of the compounded marginalization faced by lower-caste women. He not only critiques the social injustices of ancient India but also draws parallels to the modern struggles of subaltern groups, illustrating how historical oppression has continued to influence contemporary social hierarchies and injustices.

The chorus in the play functions as a reflection of societal attitudes, oscillating between scepticism and blind adherence to power. Their role is to echo the public's struggle between accepting scientific truth and succumbing to the comforting narratives of religion and monarchy. Dutt's use of direct address and meta-theatrical techniques further breaks the fourth wall, forcing the audience to confront the implications of these power dynamics in their own lives.

Characters like Indrani, the Buddhist nun who resists Brahminical

orthodoxy, symbolizing subaltern rebellion, and Madhukarika, a Shudra woman publicly humiliated, represent the dehumanizing caste practices endorsed by religious scriptures. The play highlights the ideological resistance of subaltern figures against oppressive social structures, advocating for the reclamation of these marginalized voices and critiquing an ancient Hindu past often glorified without acknowledging its exploitative practices. By dramatizing such historical injustices, Dutt's work calls attention to the deep-seated caste violence that persists in modern India, urging a consciousness to challenge and dismantle these hierarchical structures.

Hayagreeva serves as a compelling representation of ideological evolution within the play's overarching critique of power and caste oppression. Initially portrayed as a loyal enforcer of Samudragupta's Brahminical tyranny, Hayagreeva embodies the harsh, oppressive force that maintains social hierarchies through violence and dehumanization. His character is instrumental in illustrating the brutal mechanisms employed by those in power to suppress dissent and uphold caste-based discrimination. However, Hayagreeva's character arc reveals a deeper complexity. As the narrative unfolds, he undergoes a significant transformation, prompted by his interactions with Indrani and Kalhan and the realization of the moral and intellectual contradictions in his actions. This evolution aligns with Antonio Gramsci's concept of ideological reformation, wherein even members of the ruling class can develop a consciousness that challenges hegemonic beliefs. Hayagreeva's gradual awakening reflects the potential for change within oppressive systems when exposed to revolutionary ideas and critical self-reflection.

His inner conflict and eventual questioning of Samudragupta's authority highlight Dutt's message that oppressive ideologies are not monolithic; they can be disrupted through exposure to truth and reason. By depicting Hayagreeva's shift, Dutt emphasizes the transformative power of knowledge and the importance of dialogue in breaking the cycle of oppression. Hayagreeva's journey underscores the idea that even the most entrenched enforcers of tyranny are capable of change, provided they confront the moral implications of their actions. In fact, Hayagreeva is not merely a villainous figure but a symbol of the potential for

redemption and ideological growth. His character adds depth to the play's message, illustrating that dismantling oppressive structures requires both resistance from the oppressed and introspection among those complicit in maintaining the status quo. Through Hayagreeva, Dutt demonstrates that genuine transformation is possible when individuals confront the ethical dilemmas inherent in systems of power.

Through the characters of Kalhan and Indrani and their battle against an oppressive regime, Dutt crafts a narrative that is not only a reflection on the past but a warning for the future. The play asks its audience to critically examine the ways in which authority seeks to suppress truth and control intellectual discourse. The voice of reason and science, Kalhan represents the intellectual vanguard in Dutt's Marxist framework. He is unyielding in his pursuit of truth, even when faced with death. His character is a clear stand-in for the revolutionary intellectual, challenging the status quo at great personal risk. Indrani, one of Kalhan's disciples, becomes a central figure in the debate over truth and knowledge. Her persecution by the king's court is emblematic of the violence faced by those who challenge dominant ideologies. The disciples, in general, represent the future generation that will carry forward the torch of knowledge.

Utpal Dutt's *Hunting the Sun* serves as a profound exploration of power, knowledge, and resistance, employing Marxist and epic theatre techniques to expose and critique the socio-religious hierarchies that have historically oppressed marginalized communities. By portraying characters like Kalhan and Indrani as embodiments of intellectual and subaltern defiance, Dutt emphasizes the transformative potential of knowledge in challenging authoritarian structures. The play's examination of caste-based and gender-based exploitation invites audiences to reflect on the persistent legacy of these injustices, urging a reevaluation of societal norms.

The enduring relevance of *Hunting the Sun* in today's world is undeniable. As societies worldwide continue to confront challenges related to censorship, intellectual freedom, and the role of science in shaping public discourse, Dutt's play stands as a powerful reminder of the perils

of allowing authoritarianism to control knowledge and suppress truth. It resonates as a clarion call to defend reason, uphold the pursuit of truth, and protect humanity's unceasing quest for enlightenment against forces of oppression and ignorance.

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**Imagining India and Challenging British Colonialism:
A Study of Elizabeth Inchbald's *The Mogul Tale***

Arnab Chatterjee

Abstract

The socio-cultural ambience of the Enlightenment paved the platform for the sustenance of women as writers and actors. With the Restoration in 1660, the English theatre was not merely reopened but received its first batch of women dramatists and actors. Aphra Behn showed how a work could be sold to make a living if not to earn substantial profit and became an inspiration for a lot of women writers of the long eighteenth century. This paper deals with a fairly unknown woman writer Elizabeth Inchbald's first farce *The Mogul Tale* (1784) to foreground the stringent critique of the British colonial discourse by an English woman writer and the politics of locating the play in India. The attempt is driven by the gynocritical approach of the second wave feminism that focused on rediscovering and studying 'lost' and 'ignored' texts. Inchbald's farce draws our attention to the fact that all Enlightenment texts are not quintessential examples of British writers' collaboration with the oppressive structure of colonialism and inspires us to look for texts that can critique colonialism providing a different notion of the dominant white male Self. Inchbald does not embrace the typical Orientalist image of the Other as heathen and barbaric that was conducive for wedding knowledge to power. She opens an alternative template that provides a critique of integrating knowledge to power, problematises the dynamics of power, and overturns the foundation of dominant knowledge by exposing its complicity with colonial project.

Keywords: theatre, British, colonialism, woman, Enlightenment, Orientalist

The eighteenth century witnessed a phenomenal emergence of female playwrights and a concomitant rise of female actors on stage. In this respect, the eighteenth century British theatre marked a radical departure from Renaissance theatre where the practice of transvestism prevailed. AphraBehn was not merely the first professional woman writer; she laid down the ground for the rise of a number of female authors who need to be discovered and studied. But the extreme libertinism of the Restoration theatre caused a trouble and the playwrights writing after AphraBehn, Delariviere Manley, Eliza Haywood avoided the overt rhetoric of sexuality. Francis Sheridan, Hannah Cowley, Hannah More, Joana Bailie, and Elizabeth Inchbald came up with a more sentimental and humane kind of plays. Female dramatists were quite anxious about the reception of their works. Thus the prologue to Hannah More's *Percy* 'begged' the favour of the audience; Hannah Cowley offered to 'bribe' the audience to listen to the 'not very common' voice of a female dramatist; Harriet Lee 'hopes, what she dares not expect' (indulgence) in her preface to her comedy *The New Peerage* (1787) and Susanna Centlivre requested her audience to 'Be kind, and bear a woman's treat tonight . . . and none but woman-haters damn this play' in the prologue to *The Busie Body*. Elizabeth Inhbald was a commercially successful playwright who wrote eleven original plays and nine adaptations that ranged across tragedy, comedy and farce. She also wrote a significant body of criticism primarily in the form of her 125prefaces commissioned by John Bell for The British Theatre (1806–9). Though AphraBehn has off and on figured in critical discussion as well as in the University syllabi, the name of Elizabeth Inchbald seldom appears in the discussion on British theatre in the Indian classrooms. The present article is an attempt to deal with a farce of Incbald's *The Mogul Tale: or the descent of the balloon. A farce. As it is acted at the Theatre-Royal, Smoke-Alley* (1784) that speaks of the theatrical representation of the encounter between Britain and India and to locate her ambivalent responses to the British colonial project.

Elizabeth Inchbald became associated with London theatre in different types of roles since her age of nineteen and successfully developed friendships with the star performers of her day like Sarah Siddons and

John Philip Kemble. Jane Spencer has discussed the life and theatrical career of Inchbald in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. She remarked: “Ambitious from an early age to become an actress, she worked hard to overcome her stammer, and in early 1770 attempted to get an engagement at the Norwich Theatre. Her family visited theatres and had acquaintances among actors, and there were dramatic renderings at home, but Elizabeth’s acting ambitions were discouraged” (2). *A Mogul Tale* was her first original play performed at Haymarket. Her first-hand experience in performance helped her to manage a stage-worthy action that involved a spectacular backdrop and exotic locales. Her experience as an actor provided a sound sense of dialogue waiting to be transported on the stage from the page. Misty G. Anderson notes: “The dominant theme of her oeuvre was the drive toward community and reconciliation” (153). Her tragi-comedies like *I’ll Tell You What* (1785), *Every One Has His Fault* (1793) centre on a sense of community of friends and family. It is pertinent to note that women playwrights in Inchbald’s age wrote a good number of comedies not merely because of the tremendous popularity of comedy but also because of the financial profit that they gained through writing comedies. While Inchbald’s popular novel *A Simple Story* was sold for £200, she received £300 for her farce *The Mogul Tale*, £700 for *One Has His Fault* and £900 for *Such Things Are*. Interestingly some of her plays included representations of India and interrogated the colonial transactions often unsettling the discursive production of colonial stereotypes like masculine-feminine, rational-irrational, scientific-superstitious, civilised-barbaric. Inchbald’s initial farces were submitted to theatre managers Harris and Colman in 1781 who refused to accept her plays. Therefore she decided to submit the manuscript of her play *The Mogul Tale* under a pseudo name to Colman and it was accepted. Spencer notes: “Inchbald acted in it herself-stammering with nerves on the first night-and, once its success was assured, declared her authorship and took applause for it from the stage (1). Though the history of the acceptance of the manuscript of her first play underlines the challenges of a woman in eighteenth century society to establish herself as an actress and also a writer, she successfully overcame the hurdles and patriarchal power-politics and became one of

the most prolific writers of her age. Roger Manvell rightly called her “England’s Principal Woman Dramatist and Independent Woman of Letters in the 18th Century London” in the title of his book on Inchbald.

The farce, *The Mogul Tale* (1784) is a direct parody of Isaac Bickerstaff’s *The Sultan; or a Peep into Seraglio* (1775) in which Inchbald had acted on the role of a female slave, Roxlana. The eighteenth century theatre never avoided the metropolitan political concerns and even a farce of apparently light note can take serious turn articulating problematic questions. In her farce Inchbald strongly satirized the defeat of Fox’s India Bill in 1783. She evoked Bickerstaff’s play by bringing in sultan, eunuch and women of the harem and the three English characters in the Great Mogul court in Inchbald’s farce remind the audience of Isaac Bickerstaff, Fanny Abington and Thomas Dibdin. The intertextual significance of *A Mogul Tale* lies not on how Inchbald evokes *The Sultan* but on how she brings in the ur-text to challenge its ideologically pro-colonial stand. She creates a parodic intertextual text where Bickerstaff’s play is used to be turned inside out exposing the pro-colonial politics enmeshed into the source text. Thus Inchbald’s play limns a different kind of colonial reality arising out of the encounter between India and Britain in the late eighteenth century where the rhetoric of oriental despotism prevalent in colonial discourses has been challenged. It is not part of an ‘imagined community’ of the eighteenth-century Britain that thrives on an overtly masculinist position by rendering the other as quintessentially feminine and fashions its own self as superior at the cost of categorising the other as irrational, superstitious and barbaric. Britishness became associated with chivalry, adventure, exploration and Protestant work ethic. Inchbald in her farce deviates from this brand of Britishness. Ashok Malhotra rightly observes: “Yet, while Bickerstaff’s play ends in an affirmation of British values- with the clear resolution of the sultan, instructed in ideas of love and liberty- *The Mogul Tale* presents an altogether different representation of Britishness” (109).

Inchbald’s plays dealing with empire and colonialism like *The Mogul Tale*, *Such Things Are*, and *The Wise Man of the East* and her interest in Continental dramatists like Kotzebue and Dumaniant foreground her

problematic engagement with British nationalism. *The Mogul Tale* brings out the falsity of the Orientalist construction of the Other while *Such Things Arewritten* on the eve of impeachment of Warren Hastings bursts the balloon of pride of the English nation in projecting themselves as rational, civilized and enlightened by exposing the abuses of colonialism. Inchbald was considered as a Jacobin politics, most notably in the *True Briton's* review of *Every One Has His Fault*, though most of her plays have implicit political inflections rather than being overtly political. The farce *The Mogul Tale* opens with a scene located in the gardens of the Mogul adjoining to the seraglio. The setting of the opening scene had an appeal to the audience who had already developed an interest in narratives of geographical expansion, violence of colonial warfare and interracial cruelty. In Inchbald's farce three English characters Johnny, Fanny, and the doctor accidentally land in a hot-air balloon in the gardens. The play begins with a spectacular contravention of the harem walls by the descent of a runaway balloon. This balloon becomes the allegorical representation of the defeat of Fox's Bill, for as Bolton (204) and others have recognised, Fox's failed Indian policy was often ridiculed as an economic balloon ready to burst. In *Staging Governance: Theatrical Imperialism in London, 1770-1800* Daniel O' Quinn has demonstrated the image of the descending balloon was deployed in a series of satirical prints in 1783 to portray the failure of Charles James Fox's East India Bill to be passed as a piece of legislation by the House of Lords (1783) to impose limits on the power and autonomy of the East India Company (20). When the three English characters realize that they erroneously come to India, they muse over their orientalist perceptions about the probable consequences of their arrival in India. The doctor apprehends: "We may be amongst people, who pay no regard to genius, science, or invention, but may put us all to death, taking us for three witches that ride in the air" (3). Inchbald depicts how the British imagination is occupied and steeped in Orientalist thought through the voice of the doctor who constructs India as a land that cannot respect the genius and a land of violence marked by the lack of scientific spirit. The doctor's apprehension shows how "European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self" (3). By this time for the Western audience

Inchbald has defined the site of seraglio through the voice of the First Lady: “In the Seraglio of his favourite concubines, where no mortal but himself dare approach in human shape, except our wretched sex, and Eunuchs who are our guards” (7). The orientalist trope as an appropriate object for bourgeois consumption has been played off in order to subvert it from within. Inchbald bursts the balloon of complacency and pride of the English nation in self-declared supremacy of the Western science when the audience finds that the Mughal emperor is aware of the technological innovations.

The problematisation of the colonial stereotype of Oriental despotism is quite evident in the way Inchbald undermines the rhetoric of colonialism from within. The Mughal emperor plays with the pre-conceived notion of the Europeans about the Mughals and instructs the eunuchs to “aggravate their fears, as much as possible” (7). He further suggests to tell them that he is “the abstract of cruelty, the essence of tyranny” (7) and the First Eunuch tells the three British “. . . the Mogul is bloody minded, and cruel, and at present inexorable” (7). To create a farcical situation with laughter and fun, Inchbald serves the bits of information to the audience concerning their general British perception of the Mughals and then turns everything upside down. The three British people who believed in the carefully constructed false image of the emperor tried to get rid of their execution in India. The doctor pretends to be an ambassador for the king of England and Johnny, the cobbler takes the guise of the pope. The Mughal ruler clearly tells the three that he is going to execute the two British men and make Fanny one of his concubines. When the three Britons are under the impression that they cannot protect themselves from the order of execution, the emperor reveals that he is not going to do any harm to them. The emperor interestingly says:

I am an Indian, a Mahometan, my laws are cruel and my nature savage- you have imposed upon me, and attempted to defraud me, but know that I have been taught mercy and compassion for the sufferings of human nature; however differing in, laws, tamper and colour from myself. Yes from you Christians whose laws teach charity to all the world, have

I learn'd these virtues? For your countrymen's cruelty to the poor Gentoos has shewn me tyranny in so foul a light, that I was determin'd henceforth to be only mild, just and merciful. You have done wrong, but you are strangers, you are destitute- You are too much in my power to treat you with severity- all three may freely depart (20).

This statement forms the crux of the play as the statement of the emperor demolishes the constructed image of a Mughal and foregrounds his magnanimous self. The Mughal emperor's emphatic assertion of his identity as an Indian and a Muslim is a masterstroke by Inchbald as she did not adhere to the Orientalist construction of Islam based on rabid racial hatred. In *Orientalism* Edward Said argues: "Orientalism turned Islam into the very epitome of an outsider against which the whole European civilisation from the middle ages on was founded" (70). Inchbald neither participates in the construction of Muslim rulers as cruel invaders and destroyer of Hindu culture nor shows British intervention in India as a kind of release of the Hindus from the rapacity of Muslim rule. Instead of getting involved in the power politics and thinking over how to take over the administrative control of the country, the Doctor says in the concluding dialogue of the play: "And present my compliments to him, and let him know that I will explain the generosity of his conduct in a *Mogul Tale*, that I intend to publish, giving an account of our adventures in our grand Air Balloon" (21). Ashok Malhotra rightly remarks: "Inchbald's *A Mogul Tale* mocks the British imperial mission and Orientalist essentialisations about India. The subcontinent thus serves as a site for deconstructing English masculinity and the colonizing mission" (110).

Inchbald does not represent the colonised as completely devoid of any kind of voice and agency. The Mughal ruler seems to be what Srinivas Aravamudan calls a 'tropicopolitan' subject who can dismantle Euro-Christian notions of constructing and reconstructing India. Aravamudan uses "the term tropicopolitan as a name for the colonized subject who exists both as fictive construct of colonial tropology *and* actual resident of tropical space, object of representation *and* agent of resistance. In many historical instances, tropicopolitans-the residents

of the tropics, the bearers of its marks, and the shadow images of more visible metropolitans- challenge the developing privilege of Enlightenment cosmopolitans” (4). Exploring India and making it a subject of colonial discourse, Inchbald does not construct the Mughals as heathen and barbaric waiting to be enlightened by the British domination but draws attention to the capacity of the Mughals to resist domination. To conclude, the narrative of colonialism was never unidirectional and homogenous. Inchbald’s play clearly shows how all British texts do not unanimously sing the anthems of empire within the matrix of strict patrolling of strict racial codes. It does not merely translate India on British stage only out of innocent fantasy for the Orient but provides a critique of colonialism from within.

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From Minstrel Shows to Social Media: The Dark Legacy of Blackface

Nivedita Karmakar

Abstract

This paper explores the troubling evolution of blackface, from its racist origins in 19th century minstrel shows in America to its contemporary form known as digital blackface in social media platforms. Emerged in the United States during the 1830s, blackface minstrelsy was a popular theatrical entertainment that featured white performers with blackened faces imitating and stereotyping Black people. In the present scenario of digital blackface, Black people's expressions, mannerisms, and cultural references are taken out of context and commonly used as memes, GIFs, reactions images and videos. These snippets are then used to represent a wide range of emotions or ideas for non-Black audiences. Memes and GIFs often rely on one-dimensional and stereotypical portrayals of Black people, such as the "angry Black woman" or the "hypersexual Black male", quite similar to the minstrel practices. Thus by ignoring the depth and complexity of the Black community, it often reinforces existing biases and racial discrimination.

Hence, by analyzing the historical context and harmful impact of blackface minstrelsy, the paper argues that digital blackface perpetuates the same stereotypes and cultural appropriation within the online environment. Digital blackface continues to dehumanize Black people and diminish the complexity of Black culture. The paper further explores how digital blackface has become a pervasive issue in popular culture due to the rise of social media and the ease of sharing online content and how can we work towards creating a more inclusive online space by recognizing its harmful effects.

Keywords: Social Media, Memes and GIFs, Digital Blackface, Blackface Minstrelsy, Stereotyping, Cultural Appropriation.

In the age of the internet and social media, the widespread sharing of images, memes, and GIFs featuring Black celebrities or ordinary Black individuals has become a common practice. For example, the widespread use of GIFs featuring “Crying Jordan” (famous basketball player Michael Jordan crying), Michael Jackson eating popcorn, or various memes related to Oprah Winfrey. However, this seemingly harmless phenomenon, often referred to as digital blackface, is deeply rooted in a racist tradition that dates back to the 19th century: blackface minstrelsy. This essay will explore the evolution of blackface from its historical origins to its contemporary manifestation in the digital realm. By examining the appropriation of Black cultural expressions, vernacular language and the use of stereotypes, this paper will shed light on the harmful nature of digital blackface and its ongoing influence on popular culture.

The Blackface Minstrelsy was primarily developed by white Americans, which became a popular form of entertainment during the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. Developed from different forms of entertainment traditions like travelling circus and medicine shows, these performances cast a long and troubling shadow in American culture as these represent stereotyped portrayals of the African Americans. In its earlier days, blackface was performed mostly by white actors, who used to put ‘blackface’ makeup, which is, they used to paint their face using burnt cork, grease or even show polish to darken their skin tone. They also used other makeups to exaggerate their eyes and lips. Exaggerations and caricatures of the African Americans, and thus, entertaining the audience by mocking the Black culture, was the main purpose of these shows. Further, they tried to portray the Blacks as lazy, dim witted and childish. While stereotyping was common across immigrant groups in American music halls, blackface minstrelsy took it a step further. These performances actively perpetuated prejudice, hatred, and hostility specifically towards African Americans. “The stock characters of blackface minstrelsy have played a significant role in disseminating

racist images, attitudes and perceptions worldwide” (“History of Blackface”).

Historically, Thomas Dartmouth “Daddy” Rice (1808- 1860), is considered the most popular entertainer on minstrel stage, using tattered African American dialect, songs and dance forms. He is regarded as the “father of American Minstrelsy”, and there was even a statue of him, in blackface, on Broadway. He developed the (in)famous character of Jim Crow. He based this character on the folk trickster, famous among the Black slaves. He even adapted and popularized the Black folk song “Jump Jim Crow” in his shows. Interestingly, the Jim Crow Laws (1870s – 1965; racist laws reinforcing segregation in the Southern United States) developed its name after Daddy Rice’s derogatory acts. Other stock characters of the minstrel shows were: Zip Coon (sung and popularized by George Dixon in 1834; it represents the stereotyped dandified free Blacks in the northern US, dressed in high style and speaking malapropos. The Jim Crow and the Zip Coon were later merged together by the performers and emerged as the Coon), Uncle Tom (a stereotyped and melodramatic version of Stowe’s Uncle Tom, popularized in Tom Shows; usually good and sober, but laughed at because of his naivety), the Buck (usually a large, black man, proud and often menacing; interested in white women), the Mammy (a big, fat housekeeper; strong and fiercely independent, protective mother figure. She is also popular among the advertisers), the Wench or the Temptress (in the minstrel era, this role was usually played by a male actor in women’s costume. Later, mostly female mulattos played this role), the Tragic Mulatto (a mixed-blood male or female, who usually appears white, until they discover that they have Negro blood), the Pickaninny (kids with bulging eyes, unkempt hair, red lips and wide mouths stuffed with huge slices of watermelon). Hence, while minstrel shows featured various characters of both genders, white performers selectively amplified specific traits for each. These characteristics, often rooted in racist stereotypes, were then exaggerated to an obscene degree, resulting in deeply offensive portrayals that amounted to cultural appropriation.

The first full-fledged blackface performance on stage was possibly developed in 1842. A group called the Virginia Minstrels, under the

supervision of Daniel Decatur Emmett (1815-1904), performed in blackface, imitating the African songs and dance styles, to the accompaniment of bone castanets, fiddle, banjo, and tambourine. The format of this show became very popular, and soon, there were several imitators who started performing in blackface. Gradually, the minstrel shows developed a three part structure: a series of songs, jokes and dances by performers in blackface, a variety of specialty acts and a short farce or parody.

The story of African Americans and minstrel shows is more complex than just white exploitation. African Americans themselves eventually entered the minstrel stage, because of limited performance opportunities for them elsewhere and the chance to earn a living. However, most ironic part of this tradition was that even the African Americans had to put the blackface makeup on and carry on with the stereotypes established by white performers. William Henry Lane aka Master Juba (1825-1853) was one of the first African Americans who performed blackface in front of white audiences. He invented tap dancing, and eventually became so famous in this field that he later started performing in his own skin.

Blackface minstrelsy eventually became famous in Broadway as well. Two minstrel performers, the celebrated duo Bert A. Williams and George W. Walker, paved the way for future African Americans on Broadway. Bert A. Williams (1874-1922) was born in Bahamas. His family eventually immigrated to San Pedro, California. In his younger days, Williams started a touring show with white boys to earn some easy money. However, this expedition eventually failed, and he met George W. Walker (1873-1911) in San Francisco. Walker, on the other hand, was born in Kansas. He was a child performer in a minstrel group in his hometown, hence quite familiar with the ups and downs of this industry. After several failures in their early performances, this duo eventually became a part of *In Dahomey* (1902), which was the first, full-length musical, written and performed by African Americans and became a great success on Broadway stage. It became so successful that it moved to London's West End, even a performance was organized in Buckingham Palace. With their huge success on minstrel and vaudeville shows, they became the "Two Real Coons" of their time. Although

performing blackface, this duo developed a certain routine on their act that goes beyond the norm of blackface minstrelsy. Williams discussed his process in an interview published in 1916 (qtd. in Ndounou):

I try to portray the darcy, to the fullest extent, his fun, his philosophy. Show this shiftless darcy a book and he won't know what it's about. He can't read or write. But ask him a question and he'll answer it with a philosophy that has something in it... there is nothing about the fellow I *work* that I don't know. I have studied him, his joys and sorrows. *Contrast is vital.* (65)

Bert Williams' legacy thus remains complex. While he challenged the stereotypes to certain extent, his participation in blackface minstrelsy perpetuates the stereotypes nonetheless.

Overall, the legacy of minstrel shows is one of racism and cultural appropriation. While the popularity of blackface minstrelsy faded after the World War I, other entertainment forms (like the vaudeville shows, radio and television shows, films and racial cartoons) carry forward its dark legacy, by blatantly relying on racial caricatures. Several famous Americans have been associated with it. For example, Al Jolson performed blackface on Broadway well into the twentieth century. Judy Garland performs blackface on-screen in *Everybody Sing* (1938), one year prior to her famous appearance on *The Wizard of Oz* (1939).

In recent years, the concept of digital blackface has emerged as a modern manifestation of this racist tradition. With the widespread use of social media and the proliferation of digital content, non-Black individuals have increasingly adopted the practices of minstrelsy in the online space. The concept of "digital blackface" is associated with non-Black individuals utilizing digital media, such as GIFs, memes, or audio clips featuring Black people, to express emotions or convey ideas on various social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp, YouTube etc. Lauren Michele Jackson, a cultural critic, popularised the term "digital blackface" in a 2017 Teen Vogue essay. She defines digital blackface as when non-black individuals adopt and exaggerate stereotypes associated with Black culture, such as being

overly joyful, sassy, loud, or “ghetto,” without comprehending the historical and cultural nuances behind these expressions. Jackson observes that Black characters in media are often being reduced to one-dimensional stereotypes. This practice echoes the harmful stereotypes perpetuated in minstrel shows.

One common example of digital blackface is the use of GIFs or memes featuring Black celebrities expressing exaggerated emotions. These images are often used to convey a particular sentiment, such as surprise, anger, or excitement. However, by reducing Black individuals to their emotional reactions, these depictions can contribute to a dehumanizing and objectifying portrayal of Black people.

Another form of digital blackface involves the appropriation of Black vernacular language and cultural references. Non-Black individuals may use African American Vernacular English or reference Black cultural phenomena in a way that is often mocking or disrespectful. This practice can be seen as a form of cultural appropriation and can reinforce harmful stereotypes about Black people.

Digital Blackface is not only limited to memes and GIFs anymore. TikTok’s video-centric format has contributed to a unique manifestation of digital blackface on the platform. Unlike text-based or image-based instances on platforms like Facebook and Twitter, where Black vernacular or memes are often appropriated, TikTok users embody “Blackness” through personalized videos. This involves mimicking Black rhythms, gestures, affect, and slang with a high degree of creative control. The success of these videos often depends on the creator’s ability to capture and maintain audience attention, effectively turning the adopted Blackness into a tool for gaining visibility. This aspect is nothing short of modern day minstrelsy in virtual world.

Digital blackface has significant negative consequences. It can perpetuate harmful stereotypes about Black people, reinforce existing biases, and contribute to a climate of racism and discrimination. By reducing Black individuals to one-dimensional caricatures, digital blackface can dehumanize and objectify them. It can also cause a negative impact on mental health of Black individuals as one can feel frustrated and

marginalized after consuming these contents online for a longer period of time.

Hence, to tackle Digital Blackface, education and awareness are the keys. By educating people about the historical context of minstrelsy and the harmful impact of digital blackface, we can foster greater understanding and empathy. The power dynamics within digital spaces can influence the perpetuation of digital blackface. Recognizing and addressing these power imbalances is crucial for creating a more equitable online environment. Additionally, social media platforms and other online platforms can play a role in combating digital blackface. They can implement guidelines and policies that prohibit the use of harmful stereotypes and promote respectful online interactions. Individuals can also take action by challenging digital blackface when they encounter it. By speaking out against harmful stereotypes and promoting positive representations of Black people, we can contribute to a more inclusive and equitable online environment.

Reference Images:



(1)



(2)



(3)

Various Examples of Digital Blackface:

1. Crying Jordan: A popular GIF and meme portraying Michael Jordan, the famous basketball player, being overwhelmed and crying during his 2009 acceptance speech. This photo went viral immediately and it signifies the simultaneous mocking and celebrating a masculine person showing his vulnerability.

2. Michael Jackson chewing popcorn: another popular GIF suggesting having a good time while observing the internet trolls having a fight, or indulging in some internet gossip.

3. Oprah Winfrey in a meme. These expressions of Oprah shown in these two panels have been used in different meme formats online. This is one of the examples.

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**Refugee Women as Represented in the films
Meghe Dhaka Tara and *Mahanagar***

Sangeeta Mondal and Probal Roy Chowdhury

Abstract

Partition has destroyed a whole generation of women; it has also provided an opportunity for many women to move into the public sphere which was even unimaginable to many women before Partition. After Partition, this intricate meshing of the political life of the women meant a drastic restructuring of the private-public dichotomy. The post-Partition state in Bengal was like old wine in a new bottle! Such large-scale displacement of women made the country think about workplaces where women were a new presence and on political mobilization where women began to participate in great numbers. In this article I would like to analyse the factors which led or rather compelled Hindu refugee women to cross their domestic barriers and go out in the public sphere for survival. My objective is to establish the fact that it was not only financial need that made them leave their private sphere, but also the urge of personal freedom, identity and self-dependence which prompted them to do so. For this paper, I have taken up the films *Mahanagar* (The Big City) written and directed by Satyajit Ray and *Meghe Dhaka Tara* (The Cloud-Capped Star) written and directed by Ritwik Ghatak. If *Meghe Dhaka Tara* portrays the disintegration of a middle-class Bengali family resulting from adversity, poverty, egotism, and minor, internal conflicts, *Mahanagar* illustrates the patriarchal anxieties in the context of the altered nature of work.

Keywords: Partition, private, public sphere, breadwinner, family conflicts

“Refugees didn’t just escape a place. They had to escape a thousand memories until they’d put enough time and distance between them and their misery to wake to a better day.”—Nadia Hashimi

If we analyse the situation of Partition as a mass-scale displacement, we shall see that how the women retrieved the daily requirements of reproduction. Some women started up the family routine in changed circumstances; they rebuild the rhythms of daily subsistence, at least the organization of shelter. If we study the role of women in recreating the space in the process of resettling in the outskirts of Calcutta, Rachel Weber makes a discrimination between the traditional and privileged women making the passage from the home to the world and the passage in the case of the displaced refugee women:

The type of analysis which separates spaces so rigidly and then speaks of a coming out does not reflect the complex relations between women, power and space. Women do not simply cross these borders when they cross the thresholds of their houses. It is not as simple as the same in Satyajit Ray’s interpretation of Tagore’s *Ghare Baire* (The Home and the World) when Bimala walks through the splendidly-lit corridor into the public world of men and nationalist politics. Refugee women did not really move into public life, but rather the domestic world expanded to include their participation in political, community and economic affairs. (Rachael 78-79)

It has been seen that the uprooted or dislocated women refused to succumb to the dictates of faith. They kept their new shelter in camps and refugee settlements and at the same time ventured out to acquire skills and earn. In West Bengal, particularly, the historic assertion of the refugee woman as the tireless breadwinner changed the digits of feminine aspiration of a Bengali housewife and altered the social landscape irrevocably. According to Butalia, if Partition has destroyed a whole generation of women, it has also provided an opportunity for many women to move into the public sphere which was even unimaginable to many women before Partition. During an interview with the Research Team, School for Women Studies, Jadavpur University, Sukumari

Chaudhuri, who was a militant leader in the workers' struggle in the Bengal lamp factory testifies the following fact:

Our salary was very low. In 1955, the agitation for payment of bonus sharpened. Marching shoulder to shoulder with their male counterparts, refugee women participated wholeheartedly in the agitation. This was a great morale booster for their male colleagues. (Bagchi 145)

Due to the political turmoil after independence, many women went back to East Pakistan to resume their unfinished work. After Partition, this intricate meshing of the political life of the women meant a drastic restructuring of the private-public dichotomy. The post-Partition state in Bengal was like old wine in a new bottle! Such large-scale displacement of women made the country think about workplaces where women were a new presence and on political mobilization where women began to participate in great numbers.

The disturbance of Partition left scars on the mind of the people in the early years of independence. Around 1949, Calcutta began to overflow with refugees who first took up residence on Sealdah's railway platforms before establishing refugee colonies on the city's periphery. From a city of armchair babus committed to genteel culture, the refugee population turned Calcutta into a militant, furious, communist metropolis where middle-class women displaced from the safety of their country homes came out to work. In this article I would like to analyse the various factors which led or rather compelled Hindu refugee women to cross their domestic barriers and go out in the public sphere for survival. My objective is to establish the fact that it was not only financial need that made them leave their private sphere, but also the urge of personal freedom, identity and self-dependence which prompted them to do so. The condition of the female victims of Partition were more miserable than their male counterparts as 'honour' is the word that is synonymous with women. And during and after Partition such women were many who were either raped, molested, abducted or were presumed to have been subjected to the above tortures. For this paper, I have taken up the film *Mahanagar* (The Big City) written and directed by Satyajit Ray based

on the short story *Abataranika* by Narendranath Mitra and *Meghe Dhaka Tara* (The Cloud-Capped Star) written and directed by Ritwik Ghatak, based on a social novel by Shaktipada Rajguru with the same title.

The story by Narendranath Mitra, *Mahanagar* illustrates the patriarchal anxieties in the context of the altered nature of work. The working immigrant now had to contend with lecherous male clients at work, envious husbands and a frustrated father-in-law at home, as well as impediments in her career. “The Big City” was first published as *Abataranika* in the Puja issue of the *Anandabazar Patrika* (1949). The protagonist, Arati Majumdar, is a young housewife from the middle class who was uprooted from East Bengal. Subrata, Arati’s husband, asks her to work as a door-to-door salesperson for a firm that sells knitting machines so that she may assist with the financial burden of supporting their big family of eight, which includes his parents, three younger siblings, Arati, and their kid. Subrata stands up for his wife’s profession against his parents’ criticism, but their marriage is severely strained by Arati’s hard hours and his own fears.

As Rachel Weber learned from her interviews, not all women welcomed this new-found independence. (Weber 76) This individual freedom was also a form of slavery, a burden which one can neither carry, nor avoid. The Bengal Partition filmmaker Ritwik Ghatak has captured the essence of the new refugee women in the reestablished colonies on the outskirts of Calcutta in the epic figure of Nita, the protagonist of *Meghe Dhaka Tara*. Here is the sorrow and victory of Bengal’s uprooted women. These uncommon accounts of the suffering of women combine myth and fact in a useful synergy. (Bagchi 27) In viewing the question of displaced women’s empowerment, Joya Chatterji is cautiously optimistic:

Displacement, of course, was not automatically the harbinger of progress, still less of the emancipation or ‘empowerment’ of refugee women in some simple or linear progression. Working women tended to have little control over the wages they earned. Despite the growing contribution their salaries made to the family’s domestic economy, their control over

their own lives was by no means securely established just because they had become wage-earners. Yet some refugee women did begin to achieve a measure of freedom and opportunity by joining the paid workforce or by gaining an education. These developments caused significant shifts in the social mores of caste Hindus. 'Decent' women, traditionally tucked away in the 'antahpur', (the Hindu equivalent of the 'zenana') now went out and about in the big world, bringing irreversible changes in Hindu middle-class notions of propriety and respectability. (Chatterji 153-154)

Before discussing the idea of home as it is understood by women, let us examine the circumstances leading to the coming out of the refugee women into the public domain. Why is it such a graphic subject if women have to leave their houses for work? To this end, we must return to the idea of home as understood by Hindu middle-class women. How are house and home related, and why do women consider them to be so sacred or significant places? This is most likely due to the reason that women enter this field as they are usually in charge of establishing a connection between the social and physical components of the built environment. They are in charge of turning a house into a home by adding warmth, affection, and the aromas of home cooking. Women's dominion, sphere, and location have always been inside the house and have been connected, across time and cultures, to a private world apart from a public one inhabited by males. Both areas have particular social and economic implications: the enshrinement of the morality, selflessness, and caring ethic that are purportedly present in the home as opposed to the world of men where profit and self-interest are paramount.

The lives of many Bengali women were affected by Partition. Their lives took a turn that permanently altered the gender dynamic in the city both during and after the division, especially in Calcutta. Women started working in a variety of occupations, such as sales-girls, train hawkers, and teachers in order to provide for their families or to make a living. The women who were forced to flee their familiar surroundings managed to survive and make a living in train compartments, telephone exchanges,

offices and educational institutions. From a gender standpoint, the notable hindrance to the employment of refugee women created opportunities for other, non-refugee women to follow them.

Financial need drove women “out of their homes.” In the 1950s, hordes of women—who had never worked outside the home before and who, in East Pakistan, had never actually meant to—joined the wage workforce. They had lived in places devoid of the professional, service-oriented economy that a big metropolis like Calcutta could sustain. Without the properties and the combined incomes of a big joint family to support them, women found appropriate occupations. They started off as tutors, teachers, office workers, tailors, and small-business owners. The working lady with broken chappals, like Nita in Ritwik Ghatak’s *Meghe Dhaka Tara*, who represents the sacrifices women make for the family’s survival, became a familiar sight on the congested streets of central Calcutta and in different kinds of public transit. Ladies’ section in public buses and trams provided women who opted to enter the public domain symbolise refuge from the state.

The film *Meghe Dhaka Tara* focusses on a lower-middle-class Bengali refugee family profoundly affected by India’s Partition, struggling for survival in the slums on the outskirts of Calcutta. Nita, the eldest daughter, relinquished her college degree to go on a professional job. She catered to the family’s financial requirements. Nita’s sole source of joy in her bleak existence is her affection for Sanat, a young scientist she plans to marry in the future. Unfortunately, a severe disease like tuberculosis affected her, but in spite of her illness she continued to work in order to give her family financial support. Shankar, her elder brother in the meanwhile attained fame as a classical vocalist and returned from Bombay only to find Nita succumbing to a terminal illness. He takes her to a sanatorium in the mountains, where she is disregarded by her family being uncertain about her medical condition. The film symbolises a star (representing a country or a lady) obscured by clouds (Megh). Ritwik’s narrative centres on the female protagonist, Nita, a refugee from East Pakistan, shown as a quintessential self-effacing Bengali woman from the developing world, whom her family consistently overlooks. The struggle against tuberculosis exemplifies the profound irony in the

tumultuous existence of a refugee young woman. “Brother, I want to survive,” is her final utterance; she is a beleaguered lady, her family disregards her happiness, tragedy befalls her fiancé, and she is afflicted by illness. *Meghe Dhaka Tara*, an allegory illustrating the dire consequences of Bengal’s division, portrays the disintegration of a middle-class Bengali family resulting from adversity, poverty, egotism, and minor, internal conflicts. The persistent image of a train traversing the skyline indicates that the family’s ancestral land is geographically fragmented. As Nita endeavours to recuperate from the damage wrought by exploitation, self-denial, and deprivation, her anguished screams ultimately merge into the unmistakable, resonant voice of a displaced and bereft populace. Ghatak creates a unique, intense experience that captures the systematic degradation of the human psyche through the juxtaposition of light and shadow, incorporating dramatic, powerful sounds that enhance the emotional resonance and comedic undertone. This includes the bleak, surreal image of Nita descending a staircase after relinquishing her studies to aid her family, and the exaggerated sounds of cooking as the mother observes Nita and Sanat, subtly conveying her anxiety and anger over the loss of their primary source of income.

Meghe Dhaka Tara, adapted from the original story by Saktipada Rajguru, centres on Nita, who, together with her family, is one of the numerous refugees from East Bengal residing on the outskirts of Calcutta, endeavouring to rebuild their lost lives. The narrative’s heroine, a lady, forfeits her own happiness for her ungrateful family. Similar to many ‘bhadramahilas’ from East Bengal, this film depicts Neeta’s emergence to provide financial assistance for her family. Burdened by the escalating expectations of her family, Nita relinquishes her own happiness, financial resources, and well-being. Notwithstanding her sacrifices, her accomplishments are hardly acknowledged by anyone in her vicinity. The basic element of *Meghe Dhaka Tara* is the integration of the individual with the socio-historical context. Neeta finally assumes the role of the family’s only provider. The film serves as an analogy for the catastrophic division of the public and private spheres, the dissolution of the Bengali middle class, and the rise of new manifestations of patriarchal dominance. Nita strives to recover, although her lament transforms into a poignant

echo of many uprooted individuals, particularly female refugees, who endeavour to expose the injustice inside their own home realms to the public domain.

Satyajit Ray's film *Mahanagar* or *The Big City* provides a subtle depiction of the harassment faced by a working wife, as Subrata is offended by the sound of his wife Arati's heeled shoes when she departs for her office, while his mother Sarojini criticises Arati as an inadequate mother for declining to take a day off from work to care for her son. *Mahanagar* highlights the tension in marriage resulting from women's participation in the public sphere as a working woman. My article analyses how the alteration in familial power dynamics and the erosion of husbands' roles as primary providers generated feelings of emasculation, as they perceived their wives' employment as intentionally subversive. The author aimed to depict a society striving to impose conventional gender role expectations on women employed outside the house, when patriarchal authority is absent. The film compassionately portrays the challenges faced by married working women in both their professional and domestic spheres. Narendranath Mitra's *Mahanagar* was first published in the Puja edition of *Anandabazar Patrika* in 1949, under the title "Abataranika." The name change was implemented by Bengali filmmaker Satyajit Ray when he adapted the narrative into a film in 1963, capturing via his movie the fragmentation caused by Partition, affecting not just families and relationships but also the urban environment of Calcutta. The original name "Abataranika" is intriguing in its profound ambiguity. Originating from "abataran," which signifies "to descend," "abataranika" denotes "a flight of steps," "a staircase," "a ladder," and more recently, "an escalator." Unlike its etymological origin, "abataranika," meaning "flight of steps" or "staircase," does not indicate the direction of movement. Consequently, the narrative invites readers to ponder whether Arati Majumdar, the protagonist, is ascending towards the skies or freedom as she approaches her office high above the city, or if, as her husband and in-laws would assert, she is descending into moral degradation as a woman working outside the home. Besides signifying "a flight of steps," abataranika also refers to the introduction, preface, or prologue of a book, facilitating readers' engagement with the text.

This implies that Arati's challenges depicted in this short story represent the prelude to the new chapter, life, and identity she creates for herself.

A young, middle-class housewife displaced from East Bengal, Arati secures employment as a door-to-door saleswoman for a company that sells knitting machines, following her husband Subrata's appeal for assistance in alleviating the financial strain of supporting their large family of eight, which includes his parents, three younger siblings, and their son. Despite Subrata's defence of his wife's career in the face of his parents' displeasure, Arati's extended working hours, coupled with his fears, impose significant strain on their marriage. As a result, Subrata implores Arati to resign from her job, but his efforts are futile. Ultimately, under significant stress, she concedes; but just as she is poised to submit her resignation letter, Subrata intervenes— he has been terminated from his job at the bank. Arati persists in her employment but resigns a few months later in protest over the derogatory remark made by the company's director against the character of a female co-worker and friend. The film examines the transformation in familial power dynamics resulting from women's professional careers. It scrutinizes the dramatic possibilities of the upper-caste Hindu and "middle-class" female characters obtaining roles that the family and society were likely to condemn. The main protagonist of *Mahanagar*, Arati Majumdar is a direct sales representative and in this context we may quote the famous historian Gargi Chakravartty who asserts that immigrant women engaged in selling items, including door-to-door sales positions, is a profession previously deemed "unthinkable for middle-class Hindu women in those days." (Chakravartty 88) The rationale for this was that door-to-door sales necessitated women to engage with a diverse array of individuals, predominantly males. Door-to-door sales involved visiting unfamiliar individuals in their residences. This occupation frequently postponed women's return home at a "respectable" hour before sunset.

Arati's opposition to her work is expressed via the discourse of familial honour and their health and well-being. However, the underlying implication of these grievances is her husband's sense of inadequacy. The crisis is fuelled by the husband's need to reclaim control, as he perceives a loss of authority as the spouse of a professionally employed

woman. He seeks to regain his waning influence by convincing or compelling his wife to abandon her work and revert to her subordinate role in the family. In *Mahanagar*, Subrata attempts to control Arati's career decisions, dictating when she should seek a job, when to resign, when to send her resignation letter, and when to refrain from doing so. He designates himself as the custodian of her moral existence. He also oversees her social interactions. Concerning her Anglo-Indian co-worker Edith Simmons, he cautions Arati, "Careful, don't associate with those women." (Mitra 23) Subsequent to her contact with Edith at home, she advises, "It's better for you to not go to those localities, especially after dark." (95) The shift from a gentle tone in the first to an urgent appeal in the second is instigated by Subrata's job loss and resulting concern. In households whose women had traditionally been restricted to the domestic sphere, their worry focused on the appropriateness of women's public presence, as well as their marital faithfulness. The profession was perceived as undermining the family's reputation. The stigmatisation of the saleswoman profession stemmed from the perception that it was predominantly associated with Anglo-Indian women. Anglo-Indians thrived due to their communication proficiency, primarily their aptitude for conversing in English, and their overall friendliness. Kuntala Lahiri Dutt observes:

The Anglo-Indian woman was an unwitting trail blazer of women's emancipation in the city. She was carrying out secretarial duties in commercial offices, nursing and teaching at a time few Indian women ventured out to work well before that other pioneer of women's independence, the refugee girl from East Pakistan. (Dutt 69)

Anglo-Indian women's extroversion and sociability attracted the disapproval of upper-caste traditional Hindus, who perceived them as morally lax. They rejected the notion of respectable Hindu ladies associating with them. To him, Arati's "dressing up" for work signifies the incremental degradation of her morality, whether through her inclination for heeled shoes or her application of lipstick, a present from Edith. Conscious of her husband's disdain for lipstick, Arati conceals it; but, upon discovering her secret, Subrata enquires with a "poisonously

sarcastic smile... ‘So, when are you taking to cigarettes?’” (Mitra 67) Given that, at this period, the smoking of Bengali middle-class women was perceived as a marker of the decline of propriety and virtue, the inquiry evokes tears in Arati’s eyes, prompting her to discreetly discard the lipstick out of the window. Her application of night cream concerns him. Likewise, her achievements in the professional sphere further heighten Subrata’s doubts. He saw that the tall, slim Arati appeared even more attractive and seemingly younger. A profound delight seems to envelop her. What accounts for such exuberance? Was it really the little money she earned from selling the machines that brought her such joy? Was there any other explanation? Fear pierced him. (48) His apprehension may stem, in part, from the awareness that Arati encounters wealthier suitors among her affluent customers, perhaps leading her to perceive him as insufficient over time. It is noteworthy that, among Subrata’s numerous concerns, Arati’s personal safety when visiting the residences of strangers is absent. Subrata and his parents are significantly more concerned that Arati has been seen in a restaurant with another man, an elderly acquaintance of her parents.

Once the initial enthusiasm of “guiding” Arati to her career or “assisting” her in navigating the city diminishes, her employment seems to Subrata as a personal attack. He encounters circumstances necessitating the defence of her activities to his parents, despite her work perpetually undermining his manhood. The threat is dual-faceted. On one side, there is his wife’s obstinate unwillingness to resign from her position despite Subrata’s persistent appeals and admonitions. He is irritated “how she forgets that she needs to rely on Subrata’s opinions and good judgment because he is the husband!” (02) The Bengali term for “husband” in the text is “swami,” which also translates to “master.” Mitra’s selection of “swami” instead of the more prevalent “bor” underscores his argument. On the other hand, his arch-conservative father, Priyogopal, perceives the news of his daughter-in-law’s acceptance of professional employment to support the extensive family as a personal affront, attributing blame to himself for the expansion of Subrata’s household. In his fury, he retaliates by highlighting “the inadequacy of [his son’s] capabilities and masculinity,” exclaiming, “Such a large family! It’s only seven or eight

mouths to feed, including the children. Whereas, I, at the age of seventeen, had to fend for fourteen dependents, alone. And to do that, I didn't need to send your mother to work." (17) When Arati is tardy in returning home, Priyogopal admonishes his son, stating, "In what other family does the housewife stay out so late! I knew all along that this would happen. If you let go of the bridle of a horse or of a woman even once ..." (02) Priyogopal's juxtaposition of Subrata's failure with his own success in governing the household and controlling the lady is intended to inflict emotional distress on his son's already-vulnerable psychological condition. Subrata's worry intensifies when he loses his work, rendering the household reliant on Arati's income. His problem is exacerbated by his reliance on his wife's income for survival. When Arati, en route to work, requests Subrata to care for their kid, he responds with exasperation, stating, "Yes, now I'm supposed to do all this – bathe him, feed him, put him to bed. I'm his mother now, given that you're doing the father's job." (82) Salaried employment and home responsibilities equate to legitimate labour and caregiving, which correspond to male responsibilities and female obligations, delineating paternal and maternal spheres. Subrata asserts that the hierarchy has been disrupted, with the "real" labour being performed by the masculine mother, while he, the feminine father, participates solely in caregiving activities.

This paper examines the challenges faced by refugee women and the restructuring of patriarchal and patrilineal family dynamics when women begin to generate income. The narratives highlight the unwavering spirit of displaced women who reconstructed their shattered lives in unfamiliar environments, amid individuals with distinct culinary practices and a different dialect of Bengali. The prevalence of Bengali long and short fiction, along with their cinematic adaptations, among middle-class readers and viewers conferred a measure of recognition and respect, albeit not legitimacy, upon the wage labour of middle-class women, whether in teaching, selling on trains, door-to-door saleswoman or serving as telephone operators.

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Silence: Reclaiming the Partition Voices through Theatre in Britain

Gennia Nuh

Abstract

This article examines *Silence*, a theatrical adaptation of Kavita Puri's *Partition Voices: Untold British Stories*, as a powerful intervention in historical reckoning. The play reclaims Partition not merely as a South Asian tragedy but as a shared British history, challenging the colonial amnesia that persists in Britain's education system and public consciousness. By weaving oral testimony, symbolic staging, and multi-role performances, *Silence* foregrounds the intergenerational trauma inherited by the British South Asian diaspora, aligning with Marianne Hirsch's theory of postmemory. The play disrupts conventional Partition narratives by centering the voices of migrants in Britain, exposing the direct culpability of the British Empire in the rushed demarcation that led to mass violence and displacement. Positioned within decolonial discourse, the play demands a re-examination of Britain's imperial past, compelling viewers to confront the historical erasures that shape contemporary British-South Asian identities.

Keywords: British South Asian diaspora, colonial amnesia, Partition, theatrical adaptation, silence

The Partition of 1947 remains one of the most harrowing events in modern history, yet its impact remains largely unspoken, especially within Britain, the very nation that engineered it. With over a million dead, countless women raped or abducted, and more than 15 million displaced, Partition was not merely a division of land but a violent rupture of communities, relationships, and histories. The event is remembered in

South Asia with grief and pain, yet in Britain—the former colonial power that precipitated it—Partition is largely absent from public consciousness. For the South Asian diaspora in Britain, this history remains a spectre—felt, but often unarticulated. The British education system barely acknowledges the catastrophe, reducing it to a footnote in textbooks, while public memory remains overwhelmingly silent (Khan). This historical amnesia extends to diasporic communities in Britain, where many descendants of survivors grew up knowing little about their ancestral pasts due to a collective silence maintained by the previous generations.

In *Partition Voices: Untold British Stories* (2019), Kavita Puri documents the oral histories of British South Asians who lived through the carnage, many of whom had maintained decades of silence. Many of her interviewees had never spoken of their experiences—not even to their own families—until old age, when they finally found the courage to break their silence. Their stories formed the basis of *Silence*, a theatrical adaptation co-produced by Tara Theatre and Donmar Warehouse. The script of *Silence* is written by Sonali Bhattacharya, Gurpreet Kaur Bhatti, Ishy Din and Alexandra Wood and directed by Abdul Shyek. After Shayek's earthly departure, the helm of the play was steered by Aqbal Khan. Tara Theatre holds a pivotal role in British theatre as a platform for diverse, multicultural storytelling, particularly amplifying South Asian voices within the UK's theatrical landscape. Founded in 1977, it is the UK's first Asian-led theatre company, consistently creating groundbreaking work that reflects the complexities of diasporic identities, colonial histories, and cross-cultural narratives. Unlike mainstream theatre institutions, Tara Theatre actively challenges dominant perspectives, offering authentic representations of British Asian experiences that have historically been sidelined in the arts. One of Tara Theatre's most significant contributions is its ability to merge tradition with contemporary innovation. It blends South Asian storytelling techniques with British theatrical conventions, fostering a hybrid artistic space that resonates with diverse audiences. Beyond its artistic contributions, Tara Theatre serves as an educational and social catalyst, prompting critical discussions on migration, belonging, and historical amnesia. Through groundbreaking

productions like *Silence* and community-driven initiatives, it ensures that diverse histories—often erased or sidelined in British cultural discourse—are given space on stage. Its work not only reshapes the theatrical landscape but also engages new generations of artists and audiences, fostering a more inclusive and representative British theatre industry. The play *Silence* serves as both a medium of healing for the diaspora and a confrontation of Britain's deliberate historical erasure. Through this production, theatre emerges as a vital medium, reconnecting the diasporic community with their ancestral trauma while challenging Britain's historical amnesia. This article attempts to explore how *Silence* helps the British South Asian community reclaim their past, highlights Britain's failure to acknowledge its colonial history, and examines theatre as an educational tool that fosters historical reckoning.

The Legacy of Partition and Its Silence in Britain

A common misconception about Partition is that it belongs solely to South Asian history. However, as *Silence* makes clear, the events of 1947 are deeply entangled with British history. At the time of Partition, India was British India, meaning that its division was not simply a South Asian tragedy but a consequence of British imperial policy. The British education system has largely erased the realities of Partition, reducing it to a footnote in history textbooks. The trauma suffered by millions—an event directly precipitated by Britain's hasty and reckless departure from India—has not found a place in mainstream historical discourse. This silence has tangible consequences. As Alexandra D'Sa, an actor in *Silence*, notes, "If British education doesn't cover these stories, people need to hear it somewhere" (D'Sa).

The play repeatedly reinforces the shared responsibility of Britain in the Partition by highlighting the colonial voices that shaped its course. Cyril Radcliffe, the British lawyer who drew the borders between India and Pakistan, is a central figure of critique. Radcliffe had never set foot in India before and was given only five weeks to divide a country of 400 million people (Puri, 2019). His arbitrary demarcations ignored cultural, linguistic, and economic realities, leading to the mass displacement and violence that followed. *Silence* does not just recount Partition as a

distant historical event; it forces its audience—particularly British audiences—to confront the direct role that Britain played in creating this catastrophe. The play becomes a mirror, reflecting Britain’s colonial past back at its contemporary society, compelling audiences to ask: Why is this history not part of our national memory? One of the audience members stated when interviewed later, “The show takes a bit of history that I thought I knew a little about. But this really colours in all...all shades that I didn’t know and they have been denied. You know the title says it all – the silence that we have, that we have held, and that we have been given. And this fills in that silence with such humanity, such tenderness” (Tara Theatre, “SILENCE at Tara Theatre | Audience Reactions [Nov 2022]”). Puri’s work makes it clear that even within the South Asian community in Britain, silence about Partition has persisted for decades. Survivors, haunted by memories of communal violence, mass displacement, and personal loss, often chose not to burden their children with painful recollections in a new country where necessity to create a new life precedes nostalgia for the lost homeland. This intergenerational silence is what Marianne Hirsch (2012) terms “postmemory”—the way descendants inherit and engage with the trauma of past generations. *Silence*, in bringing these narratives to the stage, creates a space where this inherited pain can be acknowledged and understood.

Theatre as a Medium of Postmemory and Healing

Theatre has long been recognized as a medium capable of grappling with historical trauma. Its immersive and emotive nature allows for a visceral engagement with history that textbooks and documentaries often fail to achieve. The play does not cover all the testimonies but, with the license of the author and screen playwrights, certain stories have been chosen to bear the weight of the whole work and the tapestry of experiences, reflecting chronological emotions. The theatricalisation of all the testimonials was not possible for the range of experiences, emotions could not be accommodated. In *Silence*, the production employs a minimalist set design. The set consists of door frames and simple structures, which serve as metaphors for lost homes, fractured families,

and shifting borders (The Guardian). This symbolism of absence reflects the displacement and loss that Partition survivors experienced, creating a haunting sense of impermanence.

The play employs multi-role performances, where actors switch between playing Partition survivors, their children, and their grandchildren. This shifting of roles highlights the continuity of trauma across generations, showing how Partition is not just a historical event but a living memory that continues to shape South Asian identities today. A particularly moving aspect of the performance is how younger actors, representing second and third-generation British South Asians, attempt to reconstruct their elders' pasts. This reflects Marianne Hirsch's theory of postmemory, where trauma is not directly experienced but inherited through silence, gaps, and fragmented narratives. Also, trains play a significant role in *Silence*, both visually and thematically. Partition's most horrifying images were of trains arriving at stations filled with massacred passengers, a symbol of the brutality that erupted from the artificial borders imposed by Britain (Puri). The play integrates sound design and projections of trains to create a haunting atmosphere, making the audience experience the terror of migration, displacement, and communal violence. This powerful visual metaphor forces audiences to recognize the inhumanity of dividing a land with such haste.

One of the most innovative theatrical devices in *Silence* is the use of archival images and maps, projected onto the stage to reinforce the historical authenticity of the stories being told. This serves two key functions: first, it blends personal testimony with historical record, reminding the audience that these stories are not fiction—they are lived experiences; second, it challenges Britain's historical amnesia, visually demonstrating how Partition was an act of colonial violence, not an inevitable outcome of South Asian tensions. The play's structure mirrors oral storytelling traditions, switching between past and present, personal testimony and dramatization. The audience watches as younger generations attempt to break the silence of their elders, mirroring the real-life struggles of many British South Asians trying to understand their familial past. As the play progresses, layers of trauma are uncovered,

allowing for catharsis—both for the characters and for the audience. D’Sa describes the intergenerational impact of *Silence*, noting how “younger generations, in real time, [are] learning about the reverberating impact this violence has had on their lives” (D’Sa). This mirrors the real-world process many descendants of Partition survivors experience, as they piece together fragmented narratives, seeking to reconcile their cultural identity with a history that has been systematically buried.

Reckoning with Britain’s Colonial Amnesia

Theatre, unlike conventional historical narratives, does not allow its audience the detachment of objectivity. It demands emotional engagement. It is not just a play about Partition—it is a play about how Britain remembers (or fails to remember) its own history. By centering the narratives of South Asian migrants in Britain, the play forces British audiences to confront the consequences of their country’s colonial past. One particularly striking moment in the play underscores this erasure: the mention of Cyril Radcliffe, the British lawyer who drew the Partition lines despite never having set foot in India. His arbitrary demarcation triggered mass violence, yet his name is virtually unknown in Britain. Similarly, the broader realities of British imperialism, and its exploitative policies that led to deindustrialization, famines, and ethnic divisions across the subcontinent, remain absent from public consciousness. The play compels its audience to grapple with these suppressed truths. As a reviewer from *The Guardian* observes, the play does not merely recount historical facts but interweaves them with personal trauma, creating a narrative that is both educational and deeply moving.

For the South Asian diaspora, Partition is often an inherited trauma, existing in memory but rarely spoken about. Theatre, however, allows a communal confrontation with this past. It transforms personal pain into collective experience, allowing second and third-generation British South Asians to see themselves in their ancestors’ stories. The play also highlights the present-day consequences of Partition, particularly its impact on contemporary British Asian identity. It acknowledges the racism and xenophobia that South Asians continue to face, tracing a direct line from colonial policies of ‘divide and rule’ to modern-day

discrimination. A powerful subplot in *Silence* follows a young couple—one of Hindu-Indian descent, the other of Pakistani-Muslim heritage—who struggle with the intergenerational prejudices that Partition has left in their families. Their story illustrates how the divisions of the past continue to shape relationships and identities in the diaspora.

In Britain, Partition is not just a South Asian history—it is a British history. Yet, as Puri argues, it is barely acknowledged in the national narrative. *Silence* serves as a powerful intervention, challenging this historical amnesia by presenting Partition through the raw, lived experiences of those who endured it. Theatre, with its ability to evoke empathy and understanding, stands as one of the most effective tools for engaging with traumatic histories. *Silence* is more than a play; it is an act of resistance against the deliberate forgetting of colonial atrocities. It offers the South Asian diaspora a means to reclaim their suppressed histories while compelling British society to confront an inconvenient past. As discussions around decolonizing education and public memory gain momentum, productions like *Silence* play a crucial role in ensuring that the ghosts of Partition are not just acknowledged but actively remembered. Through performance, storytelling, and communal engagement, theatre provides a means of healing, reckoning, and ultimately, justice for those who were silenced for too long.

Breaking the Silence

A defining aspect of *Silence* is its depiction of intergenerational dialogue. The play's structure mirrors a familiar real-world scenario: young British South Asians asking their elders about Partition, only to be met with reluctance, avoidance, or vague responses. However, as the play progresses, these walls begin to crumble. The act of remembering is painful, but it is also necessary for healing. *Silence*, by staging these moments, validates the experiences of countless families who have undergone similar reckonings.

Partition was not an inevitable outcome of religious tensions—it was a direct consequence of British colonial mismanagement. The decision to divide India along religious lines was made by British officials, most notably Cyril Radcliffe, a lawyer with no prior knowledge of India, who

was given just five weeks to draw the new borders. Yet, in Britain, this history is barely acknowledged. As Yasmin Khan notes, Britain has long indulged in “selective amnesia” regarding its imperial past (Khan). While British schoolchildren learn extensively about World War II, there is no national memorial for the victims of Partition, and the subject is scarcely covered in educational curricula.

Conclusion

Theatre, as a medium, has the ability to confront historical silences in ways that traditional historiography cannot. *Silence* emerges as a crucial intervention in the discourse of British-South Asian identities, offering a poignant meditation on the ways in which the past continues to shape the present. The play does not merely recount the horrors of Partition; rather, it underscores how these histories remain embedded in the everyday experiences of British South Asians, many of whom still navigate the aftershocks of colonialism, migration, and cultural negotiation in their own lives. The play thus becomes more than a historical retelling; it is an act of reclamation, ensuring that Partition is not viewed as an isolated event confined to the past but as a living, inherited memory that continues to shape personal and collective identities.

For British South Asians, Partition is both omnipresent and elusive. It is felt in the unsaid words of grandparents, in the fragmented stories overheard in childhood, and in the disjointed sense of belonging experienced by many second and third-generation migrants. The British South Asian identity itself is marked by the tensions of a hybrid existence, oscillating between a sense of belonging to Britain and an inescapable connection to a history that Britain has largely erased from its national consciousness. This duality is precisely what *Silence* captures so compellingly. The play portrays Partition not simply as an event that “happened” in 1947 but as a rupture that continues to haunt subsequent generations, shaping their sense of self, their relationships, and their understanding of heritage. By dramatizing the intergenerational conversations between survivors and their descendants, *Silence* embodies the struggle of postmemory. The younger characters in the play, much like many contemporary British South Asians, seek to reconstruct a past

that has been deliberately omitted, piecing together history from memory, archive, and imagination.

What makes *Silence* particularly powerful is its theatricalisation of personal testimony. Adapting *Partition Voices* for the stage presents a unique challenge: how does one convey the complexity of oral histories—laden with emotion, contradiction, and unspoken pain—through performance? The play does not offer a single, linear narrative but rather presents a tapestry of voices, mirroring the fragmented ways in which Partition has been remembered and forgotten; It could not do chronological order but it abided by chronological emotions. The multi-actor, multi-role performance structure ensures that no single perspective dominates the narrative, reflecting the multiplicity of experiences during Partition. Some characters express deep sorrow, others rage, while some remain unable to speak at all—each response is valid, each silence significant. This theatrical device underscores the incompleteness of historical memory, illustrating that Partition is not a singular event with a definitive account but a series of overlapping, often contradictory experiences.

Through its use of symbolism, minimalistic staging, and the interplay between past and present, *Silence* expands the boundaries of Partition literature. Unlike conventional literary accounts that focus on either fictionalised retelling (e.g., Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*) or historical non-fiction (e.g., Yasmin Khan's *The Great Partition*), *Silence* occupies a unique space where history is not only recounted but performed, embodied, and witnessed in real time. This shift from textual narrative to embodied storytelling is critical. Literature, while powerful, often remains confined to the reader's imagination, whereas theatre demands an immediate, visceral engagement. The audience cannot look away; they must sit with the discomfort of history, listen to voices that have long been ignored, and reckon with the unsettling truth that Partition was not just a South Asian tragedy—it was a British one too.

Positioning *Silence* within the broader landscape of Partition narratives also reveals its contemporary significance. While the 20th century produced extensive literary work on Partition from writers in India and

Pakistan, the British perspective has often remained peripheral or absent. *Silence* disrupts this pattern by reclaiming Partition as an integral part of British history. The play forces its audience—particularly those in Britain—to confront the consequences of their country’s imperial past, making it clear that the scars of colonialism are not distant, foreign concerns but lived realities in British society today. At a time when political rhetoric around migration, multiculturalism, and national identity remains fraught, *Silence* is a necessary intervention, challenging the convenient amnesia that Britain has maintained about its role in shaping South Asia’s postcolonial fate.

Silence does not offer closure or resolution, nor does it attempt to impose a singular interpretation of Partition. Instead, it leaves its audience with questions—about history, about memory, about what it means to inherit trauma. The play is not about assigning blame but about acknowledgment and understanding. By bringing Partition narratives to the British stage, *Silence* compels its viewers to recognize that historical accountability is not just about remembering the past; it is about understanding its enduring impact on present and future generations. The ghosts of Partition still linger, not just in South Asia but in Britain’s South Asian diaspora, and *Silence* ensures that their voices are not just acknowledged but finally given the space they deserve.

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**“Tholpavakoothu” (Shadow Puppet Play):
Unpacking the Technical, Theatrical, and
Cultural Significance of *Tholpavakoothu***

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Abstract

This paper examines the theatrical aspect of the traditional shadow puppetry art form of Kerala known as *Tholpavakoothu*. Since Tholpavakoothu is performed using shadows against the light of lamps, it is also known as *Nizhalpavakoothu*. This type of theatrical art form is a remarkable example of cultural heritage. This paper authentically describes the history and evolution, puppet-making techniques, cultural representation in visual narratives, and rituals of traditional puppetry and contemporary puppetry in Kerala. It is a captivating fusion of storytelling, cultural heritage, and intricate craftsmanship. Shadow puppet play is often associated with the evolution of paintings, dramas, and films. Traditional tales, mythologies, or historical events are frequently performed in shadow puppet theatres. Audiences and puppeteers maintain the cultural values and ideas ingrained in those narratives so they can be analyzed using the theory of performativity. The paper explores how theatrical techniques are central to this particular art form’s contribution to the cultural landscape and how it is unique from other art forms. This paper explores the technical aspects that define Tholpavakoothu, focusing on the materials, puppetry mechanisms, and lighting techniques that contribute to its unique visual appeal. It also analyzes how these details enhance the narrative quality and visual aesthetics by examining the construction of puppets, which are artfully crafted from leather and adorned with intricate cuttings. This research highlights how these technical elements work in harmony to preserve and convey the cultural

richness and artistic depth of Tholpavakoothu while offering insights into its continued relevance in contemporary theatre.

Keywords: Tholpavakoothu, puppets, Theatre, Cultural heritage, Art form, Gender

Introduction

Tholpavakoothu is a traditional art form of Shadow Puppet play that originated in Kerala, India. *Tholpavakoothu*, an art form dating back from the ninth century, embodies cultural identity. Shadow puppet play is a theatrical performance that is performed with leather puppets. It is a ritual dedicated to Bhadrakali (Hindu goddess), especially in the Devi temples. In ancient days, it was believed that the Chinna Thampi Vadhyar (master of shadow puppet play) was responsible for making the *Tholpavakoothu*. The Brahmin community ostracized and persecuted him as he pursued learning the Kamba Ramayana (a type of Ramayana written by Kambar). He succeeded in his aim of making the *tholpavakoothu* not limited to the high-class society. In the past, *Tholpavakoothu* was an art form that existed only in temples. Still, when Krishnankutty Pulavar (a former artist of shadow puppet play) from Palakkad took up the art form of *Tholpavakoothu*, he brought this art form from the temples to the common people. This theatrical art form was played in theatres called *Koothumadams*. *Tholpavakoothu* was popular in the Palakkad, Thrissur and Malappuram Districts of Kerala. Shadow puppetry plays a significant role based on cultural and artistic values across various regions. Shadow puppetry depicts the preservation of cultural tradition and community bonding as it brings people together and fosters a sense of shared cultural identity. This art form depicts traditional stories, myths, etc. Thereby preserving the cultural heritage that will be passed through generation after generation. *Tholpavakoothu* has Religious and spiritual significance and is used as a vehicle for spiritual expression and storytelling. This research highlights how these technical elements work in harmony to preserve and how they contribute to the cultural landscape and the artistic depth of *Tholpavakoothu* while offering insights into its continued relevance in contemporary theatre and also in the form of gender perspective.

Mastering Puppetry Techniques and Theatrical Elements:

Storytelling and artistry combine to produce potent performances, and creative ideas create captivating performances and also the theatrical components that give life to the stories. Puppets can be considered constructed identities. The shadows they produce signify the construction of identities and actions. Similar to Butler's theory of performativity, the audience observes the puppets' postures, gestures, and movements as manufactured "identities." The shadow's dimensions, shapes, and sizes constantly shift based on the puppet's movements and the light's angle, emphasizing the performative aspect of identity. The movements that are produced by the puppets animate them, giving them lifelike expressions. Identity in society is created through repeated social behaviors; the puppet's identity is built through the puppeteer's repeated movements.

The materials and tools they used to highlight the importance of creativity. The materials used in the Tholpavakoothu are clothes of different shapes and colors for puppets, sticks, oil lamps, and other musical instruments. In ancient times, puppets were made using coconut leaves, but over time, this changed, and they started using deer skin. They used deerskin because of its purity and divinity. Since the play is based on Ramayana, a holy text, they believed using deerskin would represent the purity and divinity associated with the text. It was believed to be an appropriate medium for rituals and artistic expression due to its spiritual connotations. There are three main types of deer skins used for doll making. The hides of the following are used: spotted deer, southern red muntjac, and sambar deer (different types of deer). The hides of Southern red muntjac and Sambar are thick, so the dolls made from this skin are always black and white, and the skin of spotted deer is less thick, so it is used to make dolls with dyes. Then, the flexible hands of the puppets are made of deerskin and are intricately attached to the bodies. A Bamboo stick is fixed vertically along the puppets, and the movement of the play will be controlled according to the circumstances. Since deer hunting has been outlawed in the present age, buffalo hide is used instead of deerskin.

In antiquity, meditating on the top of the deerskin seat, under the tree whilst clad in tree skin, was considered divine. These austere men preferred the *darbha*¹ Grass for their *sraddha karmas*². Therefore, it is believed that one can earn boons by praying on the skin of this majestic deer. That is why the skin of the deer is considered so superior. Therefore, the reigning beliefs forbid the use of anything other than deerskin (for puppet-making) to represent the holy text of Ramayana.

Kamba Ramayana, a version of Ramayana that features hunting as a key theme, happens to be the most popular subject for *Tholpavakoothu*. This reinforces the choice of deerskin to make puppets. The style of carvings dictates the ornamentation and clothing of the dolls. All those carvings have different names depending on the decorations, such as *viralipatt*, *nakshthrakoth*, *nelmanikoth*, and *chandrakalarup*. *Viralipatt* is the carving work used for the clothes for Sri Rama, Ravana, Bali, etc. Three types of colors are used for the leather puppets: natural color, Mural paintings, and the colors used for the Kadakali (A traditional art form of Kerala). The puppet figure is then outlined clearly and finally cut out using a sharp chisel. Materials such as ornaments and dresses in shadow puppet play are drilled with especially sharp-ended chisels used to draw them. To provide colors for different characters, they used natural dyes. At least 150 puppets of various colors are used in a single performance of the play to aid in identifying the many characters and their movements.

Music is essential to the theatrical element of shadow puppet theatre since it enhances the performance. *Tholpavakoothu* explains the significance of the specific episodes while reciting the words of the Kamba Ramayanam. “Chentamil,” the pure form of Tamil, is used to create the verses. The interpretation of shadow puppet plays is done in a combination of Malayalam and Tamil. This shadow puppet theatre art form also reflects the impact of Palakkad Malayalam. Traditional instruments like the *chenda*, *manddalam*, and *cymbals* are used, and those instruments provide rhythmic accompaniment. The narration of sloka is performed in Sanskrit or Malayalam language, and they are performed in a high-pitched tone. It reflects the ritualistic nature of the art. Mainly the communities of Saiva Vellalar, Mudaliar, Mannadiar Pillay,

Nair, and Panicker perform this art form, such artists are addressed as *pulavar*.

The form of representation in tholpavakoothu cultivates a unique melding of pictorial aesthetics, a subjective approach to music, vitiating tradition, and cultural representation. The performance is almost magical, drawing the audience into the world of mythology with ingenious use of shadows, light, music, and ritualism. Everything takes place in front of definite artificial light that originates from behind a translucent screen on which puppets are seen: movement of puppets causes shadows to be cast on the screen, which gives them tangible reality. These shadows produced by the movement of puppets visually dramatize the performance. The light positioning is important for the observation of the shadow, and the movement of puppets enhances capturing the eyes of the viewers completely. *Tholpavakoothu* is an old traditional art form of puppetry that was performed during festivals or religious congregations. This fact has made *Tholpavakoothu* performances a community affair for over five hundred years, connecting the spectating individuals to the story and culture in a highly interactive manner. Along with the storyteller, the artists grasp the community through rhythmic chanting, singing, and sometimes by directly involving the audience. The immersion into this usually takes in deep connections between the audience's perspective and the cultural and spiritual beliefs of the individual. All art forms have their significance, characteristic stage presentation, and stage setup. When compared to other art forms, the *tholpavakoothu* stage presentation method is more interesting. This particular art form is performed in a theatre called *koothumadams*, and in this theatre, only the local Asharis (a particular community that belongs to a group of people) are the only people who have the right to build those structures. They cut the wood needed to build the kootharang³, make enough holes for 21 coconut pieces, and fix it in the koothmadam. The coconut pieces are hollowed out and filled with oil to be lit for the performance. Today, many other lighting systems have replaced it. The first ceremony before starting the koothu (play) is *Thiri uzhichi*⁴. The main pulavar has the responsibility to lighten each lamp, that is present behind the curtains. The curtain hanging in front of the koothmadam is white at the top and black at the

bottom. The white part is called *_aayappudava_*, and the black part is called *_viri_*, which represents earth and *_pathala⁵_* respectively. The lamp to the koothmadam is lit from the *_Garbhagriha_* (inner sanctum) of the temple. Bringing this lamp to the koothmadam is also a special ceremony in this art form. After lighting the lamp, musicians and koothu singers line up behind the curtain. This also has its characteristic method. The singers of koothu line up in a straight line, and the instrumentalists line up in a circle. The main instruments are the *Chenda*, *Ezhupara*, *Kuzhithalam*, *Chilanga*, *Maddalam*, and *Shankh*. It is believed that the shankh is blown to summon Lord Vishnu onto the stage to bless the performance. Special *_Vaitari_* (a vocal art form in south Indian music) and instruments are used during the performance of war scenes. For more dramatic flair for this occasion, the fire is fanned with a powder of Sambrani⁶, this makes the audience more draw into the performance. During the presentation of the *Garudapathi⁷* story, there is a practice of bringing Garuda's wood doll to the koothumadam from outside the venue. This is the only story where a wooden puppet is used in *Tholpavakoothu*. *Tholpavakoothu* is popular among the audience for its immensely aesthetic visual appeal.

Cultural Significance: The plays were traditionally performed in the temples of Kerala, particularly in the northern belt, as part of temple festivals and were regarded as a ritual offering to the gods. With inherited divine associations, the art form becomes more than just entertainment, and the puppets are seen as divine vessels whose actions are intended to entertain, invoke blessings, and be accompanied by music and chants. *Tholpavakoothu* was a vital component of collective existence in Kerala — particularly in the countryside. The performance would often be for the temple courtyards or village squares and would usually involve the local community in both preparation and performance. It also worked in establishing a communal bond, being a cultural event experienced by all, and beyond social differences. Great epics like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata are preserved through this art form for posterity. *Tholpavakoothu* is a unique storytelling medium that brings Hindu epics like the Ramayana and Mahabharata to life. The art form of *Tholpavakoothu* has been changing with the times, but when it is

performed in temples, it is carried forward according to its customs and rituals. This is closely associated with the temple festivals and rituals of Kerala, particularly in the Palakkad region. The craftsmanship of the puppets is so meticulous that they are crafted with incredible precision. They are accompanied by traditional music and narration, enhancing the aesthetic and functional experience overall.

Today, it is clear that modernity has entered into *Tholpavakoothu*, which has kept the hearts of the audience forever on edge and lifted the audience to the heights of drama and spirituality. The advent of technology has given a more dramatic feel and a heightened level of enjoyment to *tholpavakoothu*. *Tholpavakoothu*, which used to be exclusively only a temple art, has become more popular and now it has become a part of the public arena today. The advent of modernity has improved both the style of presentation and enjoyment of *tholpavakoothu*. LED lights and aluminum arangs have replaced the mud and bamboo in the kootharangs—they are signs of a transition to modernity. However, the pulavar is still careful to present its divinity while performing puppet shows in the temple courtyard. While the *tholpavakoothu* of the past presented stories like Ramayana and Mahabharata, modern performances incorporated modern ideas meant to stimulate social consciousness. In this modern era, shadow puppet play is presented on the public stages based on the stories of the Bible. The life of Jesus is also presented based on the holy text; that is why *Tholpavakoothu* and the artists who perform in the theatre have become more popular. Experiments are being conducted today in *Tholpavakoothu* to present actors and puppets together on the stage in modern theatres. Kooth (play) training, which was once taught through the gurukula⁸ system, has been adapted for modern education techniques like graduation.

In the past scenario, when *kooth* was performed, instrumentalists and *kooth* singers would line up in the *koothmadam* to play the background music. Today, however, digitalization has entered into this sector as well. Technology has replaced traditional presenting instruments, hymns, and interpretation in Shadow puppet play. It can be said that dramas like mime and film are similar to the modern expressions of shadow puppet play. Mime, by comparison, has humans in charge of impersonating

others while in shadow puppet play dolls are performed. Mime has been performed with the help of background music. *Tholpavakoothu* includes sloka⁹, commentary, and instruments. In mime, the characters are visible in front of the audience, while in *tholpavakoothu*, the characters are present behind the curtains. In another way, it has some similarities among the art forms of mime and shadow puppet play. The *tholpavakoothu* elements are included in modern theatrical productions such as shadow puppetry, traditional music, films, etc. *Tholpavakoothu*, a traditional temple-based shadow puppetry art, has successfully transitioned into the modern era while retaining its spiritual essence. *Tholpavakoothu* has thus found its way into short films and other animations, providing an amalgamation of creative traditionalistic narrations with visual effects. Digital art installations inspired by the music of shadow puppet plays have been created by artists, merging traditional and modern forms of creativity to deliver immersive experiences. Education curricula that incorporate *tholpavakoothu* as a tool to impart knowledge about history, mythology, and cultural values to children should be designed to proliferate the importance of the art form among the future generation.

Puppets being the main attraction in *tholpavakoothu*. There are a few classifications according to the method of making and presenting the dolls. Glove puppets, string puppets, Rod puppets, shadow puppets, and water puppets are the types of puppets generally used in *pavakoothu*. Since ancient times, puppet shows have been held not only in Kerala but also in Punjab, Bengal, and Maharashtra. However, each puppet has its own beauty in its way. Compared to Kerala, glove puppets are popular in Maharashtra, Bengal, and Odisha. In the past, immigrants from Andhra Pradesh used to come to Kerala to perform glove puppet shows. Still, with the spread of Kathakali, they started taking stories from it and making puppets inspired by the art form of Kathakali. History says that some similar puppet shows were held in Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh in the past. The veracity of this hypothesis remains unresolved. Shadow puppetry in Odisha is known as “*kundhaynacha / Gopileela*”. But in Bengal, the puppet show is presented as a part of folk tradition. Therefore, they do not have any stage systems like shadow puppet theatre. This

puppet show is based on Jayadeva Kavi's "Gita Govinda". In Bengal, the puppet show is performed by only two people. In Rajasthan, the situation is different. There, string puppets are used for presenting puppet shows. String puppet shows have also gained popularity in Karnataka and Bengal. Folk music is used in Rajasthan for this, they use a whistle called "Boli". Although *tholpavakoothu* has a Tamil influence, in Tamil Nadu, it is known as "*Bommalatt*". The narratives of *bommalattam* include the stories that are taken from the great epics like Ramayana, Mahabharata, and folk tales. *Bommalattam* has some differences as compared to shadow puppet play. In *Bommalattam*, puppets can walk, dance, and perform an actions. They had to use the natural daylight or the modern stage lighting for the staging of the performance. It is performed on a wooden stage or on open ground. So, both these arts highlight the ingenuity of South Indian performing arts and their adaptability in preserving cultural heritage. The cultural scenery of India is laden with the richness of the visual pleasures provided by these diverse puppet shows.

Gender Perspective of Shadow Puppet Play: *Tholpavakoothu* has been maledominated for many generations. Women were not allowed to enter the theatres, but when this art form reached the outdoor stages, women started being invited to the theatres, and they lent their voices to characters, mainly female characters like Sita, Mandodari (characters from Ramayana), etc. Now, Pulavar has made a change to this art form, they give importance to involving the females in this art form. This art form is known as *Pennpavakoothu*. Women mainly perform this art form. *Pennpavakoothu* is now performed successfully across the stages. They come up with innovative themes, and the artists are creating new stories for the modern age beyond the temple walls. They show the current issues and other societal problems. Females started to manage this art form by taking responsibility for everything during the performance, from sorting and loading puppet boxes into the vehicles and setting the stage to maintaining the puppets. Modern tholpavakoothu adaptations have begun to subvert traditional gender roles, presenting women as more empowered and self-sufficient than ever. Traditionally, the art form of *Tholpavakoothu* is performed primarily by men, completely

shutting out women from active participation, mainly in the theatre, it may have been because of the social mores in Kerala. These contemporary performances are focused on issues such as gender equality, female empowerment, and how women in society navigate gender politics. The evolution of these newer forms has a long way to go regarding social inclusivity and intersectionality. Those who were shunned in the name of impurity and femininity are today performing Rama stories on the stage. It can be added that today, the male voice prevalent in theaters has given way to the female voice. This era of women's empowerment and gender equality is also reflected in the art form of *tholpavakoothu*. As in all other art fields, the presence of women is garnering significance in the field of *tholpavakoothu* as well.

Today, many women even come from abroad to learn shadow puppetry. In the early days, women were just involved in *tholpavakoothu* as an audience or for getting visual pleasure. But today, along with men, they are at the forefront of making puppets, reciting kooth, and performing musical ensembles for *tholpavakoothu*. The presence of women in the *tholpavakoothu* is an example of how shadow puppet play evolved and changed its context as it moved from the temple spaces to the public assembly.

Conclusion

The study of shadow puppet plays reveals its immense contribution to society, culture, and the heritage of our nation. The theatrical representation of shadow puppet plays can foster knowledge among the viewers. There is a proverb that is said in many places in Kerala: "If there is no moon, there is no shadow." So, it can be said that the face of truth was given to this art form. There is a belief in many cultures that when the physical body is lost, it evolves into a shadow, and it can be said that *tholpavakoothu* or *nizhalkoothu* took birth from this belief. Even today, historians suggest that *tholpavakoothu* is a centuries-old tradition that may have been brought from India to countries like China and Indonesia. Many art forms have evolved with time, but it can be said with certainty that the evolution of *tholpavakoothu* is mixed with divinity.

The fame of Shadow puppet plays relies on artistically combining history, tradition, and ritual that is presented in a visually charming manner. The technical elements of the image, sculpture, movement, stage presentation, instrument, music, dramaturgy, technique, and craftsmanship enliven the art form of shadow puppet play. *Tholpavakoothu* is a *_Trikala Sangam_* of sculpture, acting, and music. As this art form only shows the shadow of the puppet, one may wonder what is the need for colours in it. The audience does not have to see the importance of each colour in the light of an oil lamp. This art form is more than just black and white shades; it is a kind of magic of colours and light. It can be said that shadow puppet play is the root of cinematography, which experiments with the technique of modern animation in motion pictures by moving the still figures in various ways. Beauty and technique meet in *tholpavakoothu*, which brings about a magical harmony of visual pleasure. This paper talks about significant changes in the art form of *tholpavakoothu*, in particular techniques mainly in the theatrical aspect, and how the art form is relevant in contemporary society. It talks about the need to preserve the art form as it is an archive of our culture. This paper attempts to make a study based on an art form of shadow puppet play, and it aims to understand the artistic tradition with diversity and wonder. Shadow puppet play is a wonder of colour, sound, and light that brings the human mind to attaining a perfect state of artistic perfection. This art and its technical language will survive and grow beyond the framework of tradition if the new generation embraces the experiments using *tholpavakoothu* language in parallel with the presentation of contemporary issues through media such as cinema and drama.

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Foot-notes

1. Special type of grass that is used in Hindu rituals, pooja, and worship.
2. A ceremony performed for peace and tranquility of the souls of ancestors according to Hindu tradition.
3. Stage performing puppetry show.
4. Arati.
5. Imaginary world under the earth based on Hindu mythology.
6. Incense that is burned to create a calming, aromatic smoke.
7. Story from the Ramayana epic, which is performed in the shadow puppetry art form.
8. Traditional Indian educational system where students live with their teachers and learn from them.
9. Verse or stanza in Sanskrit.

“Would you like a mirror?”: Examining the Performativity of Mirrors in Genet’s *The Maids* (1947)

Debdatta Mitra

Abstract

Jean Genet’s seminal play *Les Bonnes* (*The Maids*) delves into the intricate and volatile relationship between two sisters, Solange and Claire, who work as maids for a wealthy employer known only as “Madame”. Set in Madame’s opulent home, the play revolves around the sisters’ ritualistic role-playing games, which reveal their suppressed desires, frustrations, and power struggles. This study explores the complex dynamics between the sisters as they engage in these performances, assuming each other’s identities to act out fantasies of admiration and vengeance against Madame. These enactments expose their conflicting emotions—being tethered to servitude while yearning for liberation and recognition. Genet uses the mirror as a pivotal symbol in the play, representing confrontation and self-reflection. When Solange and Claire gaze into the mirror during their role-playing, they are forced to confront their fragmented identities, shaped by their roles as maids and their aspirations for power. The mirror becomes a medium through which their insecurities and inner conflicts are revealed. For instance, Solange sees herself both as a subservient maid and someone aspiring to occupy Madame’s position. This duality underscores central themes of power and identity, highlighting how individuals perceive themselves versus how they are perceived by others.

The performative act of looking into the mirror offers a moment of introspection, revealing the sisters’ envy of Madame’s status and their internal struggles with self-worth. Inspired by the infamous Papin sisters’ real-life case, Genet captures the contrasting personalities of Solange

and Claire: Solange is consumed by jealousy and resentment, while Claire appears more composed but remains trapped in servitude. The narrative centers on their elaborate fantasies of guilt and revenge against Madame, enacted through dramatic role reversals. These performances often involve psychological manipulation and emotional abuse, reflecting their suppressed desire for control. As they mimic each other—often unsuccessfully—the mirror reflects their fragmented identities, emphasizing that identity is fluid, multifaceted, and constantly evolving. Genet employs the mirror as a symbolic device to blur the lines between reality and illusion, reinforcing the play's exploration of performance and power dynamics.

Keywords: Absurd, mirror, power, performativity, selfhood

The examination of mirrors in absurd theatre, notably in the plays of Jean Genet, exposes a complex interplay between identity and perception. They serve not only as physical objects in the setting up of a play but also as metaphors for self-reflection and foreground the fragmented nature of reality. Genet deliberately uses the mirror as a symbolic tool to challenge the audience's supposition of truth and fiction, creating an open space where the characters often engage and confront their own identities and realise the roles that they are expected to play out in society. The paper investigates the deep-rooted psychological conflicts and desires of the characters which are seen in the mirror's reflections as they attempt to impersonate each other and their employer. It will also examine the performative nature of their identities as they grapple with feelings of guilt, deception and resentment. The mirror, in effect, becomes a site of tension as the reflections of the protagonists highlight the futility of their role-playing and serves as a reminder of their servitude.

Jean Genet's landmark play *Les Bonnes* or *The Maids* (1947) examines the complex and tumultuous relationship between two sisters, Solange and Claire, who are employed as maids for a wealthy woman who is only referred to as "Madame". It is inspired from an incident which occurred in 1933 in which the notorious sisters Christine and Léa Papin brutally murdered their employer and her daughter in their home in Le Mans, France. During the course of the investigation, it was revealed

that the employer suffered from acute bouts of depression and would often target the sisters by physically and mentally assaulting them. The murder left a significant impact on the French intellectuals such as Sartre, de Beauvoir and Genet who considered it an action of rebellion and class struggle. The play is set primarily in their employer's luxurious home, where the maids often engage in a ritualistic game of role-playing that exposes their deep-seated desires, frustrations, and conflicting power relations. It investigates the interactions between Solange and Claire that are glaring for a volatile blend of envy, fear and hatred, and routinely oscillates between action and subversiveness as they attempt to enact their fantasies of domination. The maids engage in a ritualistic game wherein they assume each other's identity, reflecting their desire for power and control. The mirror acts as a literal and metaphorical surface that seemingly allows them to see themselves as both the maidservant and the mistress, thereby blurring the lines between reality and performance. This duality highlights the fluidity of identity as it is being deliberately constructed through performance rather than it being an inherent trait.

At the beginning of the play, the audience is introduced to the charged dynamic between Solange and Claire, who are engaged in the act of performing as their employer. The play opens in their employer's extravagant bedroom, that the maids severely critique as well as envy. They engage in the act of mimicry that is ritualistic and theatrical, and thereby set the tone for the exploration of identity, desire and power throughout the narrative. There is a palpable tension in the initial scene as Solange and Claire are preparing for Madame's return, exposing the undercurrents of resentment and envy towards her - "I am tired of being an object of disgust. I hate you too. I despise you" (Genet 44). They consciously engage in role-playing which they treat as a game, wherein they assume the other's identity and enact fantasies of admiration and revenge against Madame. This complex interplay highlights their contrasting emotions - they are bound by the bonds of their servitude while simultaneously yearning for freedom and acceptance. The mirror in this opening scene is significant as it serves not only as a physical object but rather as a figurative device that reflects the characters' inner

anguish and fragmented identities. As Solange and Claire play-act and are engaged at looking into the mirror, they are immediately confronted by their reflections in self-images, which are consequently shaped by their roles as maidservants and their aspirations for power. The mirror ameliorates their insecurities and anxieties; Solange, for instance, views herself both as a servant and as one who seeks to be exalted to Madame's position. The understanding of this duality is crucial to the paper as it foregrounds the themes of power and identity throughout the play - how individuals attempt to perceive themselves and how they are perceived by others. The performative act of gazing into the mirror thus becomes an opportunity for self-reflection, revealing not only their enviousness of Madame's social and economic status but also their internal struggles with self-regard. Genet's inspiration of the sisters from the true incident is clear in their differing personalities - the younger sister, Solange, is consumed by jealousy and resentment towards Madame, while the elder Claire, is more composed but nevertheless trapped in her servitude. The narrative is centred around their elaborate fantasies of guilt and revenge against their employer, which they play out through a series of dramatic role reversals. It is axiomatic that the fragile boundaries between reality and fiction are blurred as the sisters select and reject various costumes and jewellery, therefore often assuming multi-faceted identities and leading to moments of intense psychological struggle -

I liked the garret because it was plain and I didn't have to put on a show. No hangings to push aside, no no rugs to shake, no furniture to caress - with my eyes or with a rag, no mirrors, no balcony. (Genet 50)

The relation between Solange and Claire is integrated in a ritualistic dynamic that reflects their internal struggles. Genet's usage of mirrors in this regard emphasises their duality and the performative nature of their identities. As the maids engage in the game of role reversal and attempt to kill the mistress during the course of the game, their latent desires as well as insecurities relating to power and submission are reflected and exposed to the audience. The actions of sado-masochism in the conflicting relationship between the sisters play a pivotal role in

The Maids as they attempt to navigate their roles as both subservient maidservants and empowered individuals. The dynamics of power and powerlessness are vividly illustrated through the ritualistic play-acting, where they constantly oscillate between the contrasting positions of mistress and servant - "I shall be lovely. Lovelier than you'll ever be" (Genet 37). This performativity often manifests in actions of psychological manipulation and emotional abuse, reflecting the undercurrent desire for domination and control. Solange is frequently portrayed as adopting a sadistic approach towards Claire as she is engaged in enacting her fantasies of revenge against her employer by projecting her anxieties onto her sister - "Lean forward and look yourself in my shoes" (Genet 37). This dynamic is particularly axiomatic in the ritual performance when Solange deliberately forces Claire to engage in their games of sado-masochistic behaviour and humiliating her to embody the role of Madame while simultaneously belittling her in the process. In contrast, Claire showcases masochistic tendencies in finding a perverse pleasure in submitting to Solange's controlling whims and also indulging in the fantasy of being dominated. Genet analyses this complex interplay by using the mirror to create a charged setting where love and hatred coexist, as both characters struggle with their conflicting desires for control and recognition. The sado-masochistic elements in the relationship not only heighten the emotional and psychological intensity of their interactions but also serve to underscore the absurdity of the situation - they are trapped in a cycle of servitude of their own making while simultaneously yearning for autonomy. Genet's examination of these themes reveal the psychological depths and power dynamics of his characters and illustrate the broader undertones of oppression, desire, and the struggle for identity within a hierarchy which is inherently rigid and structured.

The mirror becomes an symbolic instrument for self-examination, exposing the underlying layers of misrepresentation that define the existence of the maids. As they act out their fantasies, Genet invites the audience to witness the absurdity of their condition - two individuals trapped in a cycle of mimicry and subversiveness. Additionally, other reflective surfaces such as eyes play a crucial role in Genet's plays as

well as other plays broadly categorised as absurd theatre. The act of looking into the other's eyes culminates a moment of connection while also revealing their isolation - a poignant theme in absurdist theatre. Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* uses the interplay between sight and blindness which illustrates the characters' existential predicament - they are caught in a cycle of waiting and watching, but remain perpetually unable to comprehend their existential meaning or the inherent limits of their current circumstances. Vladimir, for instance, is often concerned about his physical condition, notably his eyes, which symbolises a broader anxiousness about clarity and insight in a space that seems devoid of meaning. Beckett's preoccupation with vision underscores the characters' struggle to comprehend their reality accurately, as they wait endlessly for reprieve.

Genet uses the symbol of the eyes as a crucial motif to depict the characters' internal anguish, power dynamics, and the complexities of self-perception. The dynamics between Solange and Claire are often burdened with an intense scrutiny, as they observe each other and as well as themselves in the mirror, using their gaze to assert dominance and reveal vulnerability. The act of looking, thus, becomes a means of psychological manipulation. Solange's piercing gaze often attempts to belittle Claire, thereby reinforcing her own sense of authority while simultaneously exposing her insecurities. This complex interplay illustrates the delicate balance of power and powerlessness between the two sisters, where the action of looking at the other is intertwined with control and subjugation. Furthermore, the characters' eyes represent their unfulfilled desires and resultant frustrations. Solange's longing for the power that her employer represents is mirrored in her overwhelming scrutiny of both Madame and Claire as she projects her feelings of inadequacy and envy onto her sister, and using her gaze to dissect Claire's actions. In contrast, Claire's eyes show a blend of resignation and a longing for agency, thereby revealing her internal struggles as she oscillates between the desire to submit to Solange and her own aspirations to exemplify Madame's apparent power. The eyes mirror their emotional condition, capturing moments of rage, envy, disgust and desperation that permeate their consciousness and in their interactions. Additionally, the motif of

the eyes investigates the dual themes of illusion and reality. Though the characters often engage in role-play and other related games that necessitate the adoption of contrasting identities, their eyes become the instruments of deception that reveal the absurdity of their situation. The inability of the characters to find a meaningful connection serves as a statement highlighting the breakdown of language. The reflective nature of dialogue acts as a mirror to society's vacuity revealing how individuals often fail to realise their true selves beyond their superficial interactions.

The mirror serves as a symbolic space where the characters confront not only their reflections but also highlight their internal struggles. As they attempt to mimic each other, often unsuccessfully, the mirror reflects the fragmented nature of their identities - each character reveals how their identities can be constructed and reconstructed through performance. This duality emphasises that identity is not fixed but rather constantly evolving, fluid and multifaceted. Genet uses mirrors as a symbolic tool to blur and clash the boundaries between the fiction and the real. In his play, *The Balcony* (1956), the setting of a brothel is combined with the existence of mirrors that successfully create an atmosphere where appearances are deceptive. The characters' identities are molded by predominant societal expectations and fantasies rather than their authentic selves. Mirrors also comment on the nature of societal norms and the structuring of identity within those dominant frameworks. *The Blacks* (1958) explores themes of race and identity through a panorama of characters who confront their societal roles. Genet's usage of mirrors in this regard emphasises how the individuals internalise societal expectations and racial stereotypes. The characters' interactions with their mirrored reflections reveal their anxieties and struggles against imposed identities, thereby foregrounding the tension between the self and the societal perception. Characters in Genet's oeuvre often seek to understand their selves through their reflections but nonetheless find that these reflections are distorted and misrepresented by external influences. This search for authenticity is filled with challenges, as Genet observes that true self-realisation may be elusive in a world where one's identity is constantly shaped by perception and performance. As a result, mirrors in Genet's works are used as powerful metaphors for

the structuring of identity, revealing the dynamics of self-perception, the fluidity of performance, and the outcome of societal constructs on the individual identity. Through these performances using reflective objects, Genet consciously invites the audiences to question the apparent nature of identity, thereby prompting reflections on authenticity in an absurd existence dominated by illusion and performance.

The intricate dynamics of power and subservience that is reflected in the relationship between Solange and Claire provides a heightened literal reflection of their appearances but also symbolises the internalised societal structures that formulate their identities. Michel Foucault's theories on power, well articulated in *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1*, illuminate on the relation and supposed hierarchies of power. He argues that "power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere" (Foucault 93). This conception is echoed in the maids' interactions with each other and the mirror becomes a symbolic space where their identities are constantly negotiated through their apparent roles as both maidservants and as individuals yearning for autonomy. Solange temporarily inhabits a position of power when she gazes into the mirror while dressing up as Madame, declaring -

Claire, it's a burden, it's terribly painful to be a mistress, to contain all the springs of hatred, to be the dunghill on which you grow. You want to see me naked every day. I am beautiful, am I not? And the desperation of my love makes me even more so, but you have no idea what strength I need! (Genet 43)

This assertion reflects her internal conflict against the domineering structures of servitude and her desire to assert a semblance of control over her identity. The mirror is revealed as a symbolic space where she can momentarily escape her subservient role, thereby embodying the authority she ardently covets. This assertion showcases her desire to escape the subservient identity of a servant that imposed upon her and to overreach and claim a sense of power that is otherwise denied. Her transformation is reflected in the mirror, allowing her to construct and build an identity that opposes her immediate reality. Nonetheless, this

power is ephemeral as the action of dressing up is a mere performance that also underscores the fragility of her newfound authority.

Thus, the mirror also becomes a site of rejection and subservience, emphasising Foucault's argument that power is dynamic and constantly evolving. Furthermore, Foucault examines societal perceptions of sanity and identity formation in *Madness and Civilization*, which can be paralleled in the psychological states of the maids, thus exposing feelings of inadequacy and envy. Claire's observation that "I see the marks of a slap, but now I'm more beautiful than ever!" (Genet 45) highlights her recognition and acceptance of Solange's power in moments of rage while also simultaneously revealing her own feelings of inadequacy and impotence. This interplay underscores the construction of identities through external gazes and societal expectations in the play.

The Maids explores the themes of identity, class consciousness and power struggle. The mirror in its milieu exemplifies as a literal and figurative device that reflects the protagonists' fractured consciousness and existential anguish. As the characters are confronted by their own desires for agency and realization, they grapple with heightened emotions of inadequacy and despair. Genet posits that their rebellion is essentially ineffectual in the climax of the play during a decidedly tense confrontation with Madame, which eventually exposes the inescapable nature of their structured roles. The dramatist's usage of language is rich and symbolic, underscoring heightened emotion that evaluates the absurdity of the situation. *The Maids* not only successfully critiques the prevalent social hierarchies but also investigates the psychological complexities of the protagonists and their inherent desires. Through their routine actions and performances, the maids symbolise the struggle for identity and meaning in a world that is essentially conformist by nature. The conclusion, like most absurd plays, is open-ended and ambiguous, leaving audiences to ruminate the implications of power structure, identity and the human condition in a society, which according to Genet, is marked by oppression and desire.

The mirror facilitates psychological manipulation between the two sisters who use each other's reflections to assert dominance while

simultaneously revealing her own insecurities. Though it underscores the recognition of the other's momentary power, the mirror also becomes a site of reflection and inadequacy. They are locked in an endless cycle where each character needs the other and their identities are constantly in a state of flux as they are contingent upon the other's perceptions. They challenge audiences to confront and understand the differences between illusion and fragmented reality. The characters endlessly struggle with the dissonance between their fixed identities and the roles that they play, thereby examining a deeper apprehension of their fragmented identities. The reflections are a reminder of identities being essentially performative and constructed through societal expectations. This exploration ultimately underscores the profound dichotomy between truth and fiction that defines absurdist theatre.

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**Byomkesh and the Compromised *Bhadralok*:
An Assessment of Byomkesh Bakshi Adaptations in
Cinema and Television (1967 – 2024)**

Sanchita Dutta

Abstract

This paper explores the evolution of Byomkesh Bakshi, the iconic Bengali detective created by Sharadindu Bandopadhyay, as a lens to examine the changing socio-cultural landscape of Bengal from the pre-Independence era to the present. Byomkesh Bakshi embodies the Bengali *bhadralok*'s (middle class) hybrid Europhone cultural inheritance and the search for a 'native' identity, reflecting the intellectual zeal and societal engagement characteristic of the *bhadralok*. However, his portrayal has transformed over time to resonate with contemporary audiences, moving away from traditional *bhadralok* values—defined by Parimal Ghosh as eroding under the pressure of a pragmatic, market-driven culture—towards a modernized figure that incorporates globalized aesthetics and psychological complexity. Contemporary directors like AnjanDutt and Dibakar Banerjee have reimagined Byomkesh through the influence of noir cinema and international detective archetypes, allowing him to navigate the intricacies of post-colonial Calcutta and appeal to younger, cosmopolitan viewers. These adaptations not only update Byomkesh's investigative methods and settings but also engage with his potential political perspectives, subtly negotiating colonial and post-independence censorship. This paper argues that Byomkesh's enduring appeal and relevance are rooted in his adaptability—retaining the core essence of the satyanweshi (truth-seeker) while evolving in response to Bengal's shifting cultural identity. By tracing Byomkesh's journey from a traditional Bengali sleuth to a nuanced, globally resonant figure, the study illuminates

how literary characters can serve as cultural barometers, mirroring broader societal transformations. Ultimately, Byomkesh Bakshi remains a significant cultural icon, reflecting the complexities of a region in constant flux while preserving the spirit of inquiry and integrity that defines his legacy.

Key words: *Bhadralok*, *Chhotolok*, Adaptation, Tradition, Censorship, Modernisation.

“What kind of a transition was it that remained grievously incomplete?”—Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History* (1992).

The role of the *bhadralok* in crystallising and articulating pre- and post-Independence Indian societal and cultural developments and aspirations cannot be gainsaid: viewed as a class, the Calcutta-based and Raj-educated *bhadralok* located themselves in an arc of Anglophiliac leisure, despite their well-entrenched and, more often than not, radical opposition to British colonialism. Thus, despite the occasionally aggressive manifestation of anti-British sentiments and political and ideological posturing, the early-twentieth-century Indian, especially Bengali, intelligentsia remained an avid consumer of socio-cultural Anglophilia. This was not only limited to the consumption of Anglo-European canonical literature but extended to the domains of popular culture, cuisine, modes of socialisation, intellectual priorities, political and cultural organisation, sports and recreation and even social and religious reform; in the early Bengali detective films, such as, for example, *Hana Barri* (“The Haunted House”, 1952) and *Chupi Chupi Ashey* (“He Comes in Stealth”, 1960), the detectives not only dress in *pakka shahebi* (perfect western) attire, down to their starched waistcoats, but also mirror the mannerisms of their Anglo-European archetypes, down to the patent leather shoes and the pipes. In some distinct cases, however, the detective sports a much less westernised look and is, indeed, rather a level-headed *dhoti*-clad bourgeois Bengali gentleman, who is rooted in his time but is keenly aware of the societal and political fault lines that inform his context; the most famous instance of this conception of the educated Bengali *bhadralok* is Byomkesh Bakshi, a creation of the Bengali novelist, poet and screen-writer Sharadindu Bandopadhyay (1899 - 1970), who looks at his profession (*shotyer anveshan*) as, primarily, an exercise

of intellectual passion. This attitude seems to match the contemporaneous Bengali attitude to the *vita contemplativa*, as Dipesh Chakrabarty notes, in the 2007 preface of *Provincializing Europe*, "... [t]he legacy of Europe – or British colonial rule for that is how Europe came into our lives – was everywhere: in traffic rules, in grown-ups' regrets that Indians had no civic sense, in the games of soccer and cricket, in my school uniform, in Bengali-nationalist essays and poems critical of social inequality, especially of the so-called caste system, in implicit and explicit debates about love-matches and affairs versus arranged marriages, in literary societies and film clubs. In practical, everyday living 'Europe' was not a problem to be consciously named or discussed. Categories or words borrowed from European histories had found new homes in our practices." (Chakrabarty 2008: ix) Thus, even the pronounced *bangaliyana* (Bengali-ness) of an interstitial character such as Byomkesh Bakshi seems but an inverted assertion of this rediscovery of the "archaic" in the "modern" as Chakrabarty has implied. The norms of cultural alignment and societal accreditation, as transferred through Western detective fiction and popular cultural icons such as Sherlock Holmes, Hercule Poirot, Father Brown and Dr. John Thorndyke, found new sites in the characters of Kiriti Roy and Dr. Dilip Chaudhuri, and Byomkesh Bakshi. Among them, Byomkesh stands out as the all-knowing or, at least, all-seeing rationalist-realist private detective contrarily subject to the whims of intuition and instinct. He seemed to represent, at political, cultural, individual and societal levels, the fruition of the indigenous aspirational anxiety of Bengal's hybrid Europhone cultural inheritance coupled with a conscious battle for a more 'native' identity that again would not be genteel as per the British definition of the term. In his keynote address given at the conference on "After Subaltern Studies", which was held at Princeton University, on 27th-28th April 2012, Partha Chatterjee argues "that the time of colonial and postcolonial modernity was heterogeneous, that its practices were hybrid, and that the archaic was, in many significant ways, constitutive of the modern". Byomkesh always wears a traditional Bengali *dhoti* and locates himself within the arc of indigenous trajectories of socialisation and the spectrum of legal-criminological interests of the Bengali bourgeoisie. It is this location in the Indian/Bengali mindscape that makes the *satyanwechi* (truth-seeker) Byomkesh Bakshi, a quintessentially *bhadralok* private investigator, who

spurns that designation and prefers to call himself a ‘truth-seeker’, a fictive representation of an autonomous, proto-postcolonial identity-forming urge. He represented the Bengali *bhadralok* as used in sociocultural terms, till at least the early 2000s, to denote the Bengali middle-classes, which cultivated a specific aura of eclectic, cultural and intellectual tastes, and despite smidgens of their social conservatism, was representative of a healthy balance of intelligence and empathy.

However, Parimal Ghosh, in his influential work *What Happened to the Bhadralok*, analysed the decline of the traditional *bhadralok* class and explained how their cultural ideals gradually eroded from the 1960s. He argued that the core values of the *bhadralok*—education, moral integrity, and civility—lost significance due to economic changes, political upheavals, and evolving aspirations. In the past, the *bhadralok* represented an elite group marked by intellectualism and refinement, but over time, new social groups reshaped this identity to suit more practical needs. Ghosh observed that the rise of political opportunists, gangs, and new elites redefined power, diminishing the influence of the older intellectual class, or *buddhijeebīs*. Traditional aristocratic families and thinkers, who had once shaped public life, were replaced by a pragmatic middle class comprising shopkeepers, office workers, teachers, and small business owners—who rose to prominence by aligning with political parties. These new elites benefited from political patronage, initially supporting the Left Front and later shifting their allegiance to the Trinamool Congress (TMC) during the 2011 *parivartan* (change of power). Their focus remained on maintaining power and privileges rather than upholding ideological principles, marking a departure from the values of the older *bhadralok*.

Although these new elites retained traces of the *bhadralok* identity for legitimacy, the essence of the culture had already changed. The modern political landscape revealed the hidden, shadowy aspects of politics—such as street-level mobilisation and opportunism—that the older *bhadralok* had previously kept out of sight. As a result, the clean and civil appearance that once defined *bhadralok* politics disintegrated. Similarly, cultural standards declined, with intellectual pursuits and education receiving far less emphasis.

Ghosh concluded that although the older *bhadralok* culture had its contradictions—such as collaboration with colonial authorities and social prejudices—it still upheld ideals of democracy, equality, and progress. However, their reluctance to fully embrace these values, combined with the shifting social and economic landscape, contributed to their decline. In the modern context, the original *bhadralok* ideals became diluted, giving way to a more pragmatic, market-driven culture. Ghosh described this transformation as “lumpenization,” reflecting the shift from a refined, value-based society to one shaped by newer, more practical social realities.

Consequently, a change in Byomkesh’s characterisation became necessary to cater to the changing audience, in the visual medium. Gone were the days of Basu Chatterjee’s simplicity and love for the humdrum middle-class existence that oozed out of the entire body of his work including his television adaptation of *Byomkesh* (1993 - 1997) in Doordarshan (DD National). The fast-paced plot and the witty battles of dialogue seem to be the requirement of this time to pull the younger audiences to the theatre, especially those who are not familiar with the literary Byomkesh, and consequently, would not flock to the theatres to satiate their nostalgia to watch their literary idol on screen or relive their literary experience of solving the crime with the detective. They are mostly familiar with the stories through either a second-hand narrative from the older generations or other film and television representations of the same. Thus the experience of watching a new Byomkesh movie must reach them with the promise of delivering a new interpretation of the already existing myth of the *satyanweshi* on the screen. For these interpretations to be relevant to the younger audiences, they must be told in the language of the youth or inculcate certain elements that appear familiar to their changed taste. Incorporation of a detailed and elaborate psychological explanation of the criminal’s mind becomes a necessary element to titillate the younger minds. Even the character of young Nengti from the sixth season of the *Hoichoi* web series lectures Byomkesh to study deeper into the criminal’s psyche, and the social and personal reasons behind his crime to be an Indian equivalent of the Western Sherlock Holmes. Byomkesh ignores this sauciness in his remark with an indulgent smile, but the director of the episode must be expressing his observations

through this remark. There must be a latent desire to make Byomkesh a detective palatable to the younger generation of audiences, who are so well exposed to the modern tropes of international detective fiction.

Filmmaker and the director of multiple Byomkesh adaptations, AnjanDutt, himself admitted to having an inkling for noir films, “My limited audience restricts a bigger budget. But had I got much more than what is viable, I would never attempt a postmodern approach, for my sheer love for the noir. I’d perhaps move towards Roman Polanski’s *Chinatown*.” Again he is equally appreciative of the elements of “Tarantino’s steam-punk approach in a very Bengali context” that has been incorporated by Dibakar Banerjee in *Detective Byomkesh Bakshy!* as it would give an edge to the narrative when a post-globalisation audience. Dutt’s support for Banerjee’s film came in a review article of the latter’s film *Detective Byomkesh Bakshy* which was published in *The Telegraph Online*. He said in this article,

“Purists will denounce change. But change is inevitable. It is hugely essential to dig deep under years and layers of dated conceptions and rediscover a master’s work. Thereby one unearths the lost mystery of the material and its contemporary relevance.”

To new filmmakers and their audiences, the direct challenge of calling Byomkesh a ‘detective’, going against the wish of the author, is also a welcome change. To explain this change Dutt added,

“I have interpreted my Byomkesh as a period, middle-class, domesticated, uniquely Bengali thriller about moral and social degradation. My Byomkesh is an amoral, dialectical, adult, complex representative of the post-war, post-Independent Calcutta. Dibakar’s Byomkesh is pulp-driven, hallucinatory, crazily cosmopolitan, pre-Independent, mythical and highly diabolical. And the latter is equally valid.”

The underlying visual reference to the prison-like “*pinjrapole*” (Sudipto Roy’s take on “Chiriyakhana”) to create an extension of the dull, drab, and frustrating prison life even when literally out of prison, is purposely incorporated to depict the urge of the inmates of the place to escape,

even at the cost of succumbing back to their repressed criminal desires. AjanDutt supports this too in his review of the series, saying

“The greatest strength of Hoichoi’s version of *Byomkesh O Pinjrapole* is that the screenplay-writer Pratik Dutta changes much of the story without disturbing the main pillars. So, you get to see a completely new version of the Golap Colony and its ex-criminal inmates in a completely refreshing way.” (“Anjan Dutt writes about Hoichoi’s *Byomkesh O Pinjrapole*”, *t 2online*.)

Consequently, we do not lament the complete erasure of the sub-plot of the ‘missing cinema-actress’ from this interpretation, since the world-building of this season more than compensates for the loss. Dutt also argues in favour of the explicit last scene in this eighth season of the web series, stating that Sharadindu himself was not shy of the absurdity of the noir elements, as he had composed this scene in a manner quite unfamiliar to the *bhadralok* readers of his time. Plus there are numerous other references made by Dutt to the various other absurd choices by the writer in various other stories of Byomkesh.

“There are numerous such graphic novel-type, larger-than-life Dashyu Mohan/ Joker-like baddies in the Byomkesh stories. In Pather Kanta, the contract killer uses a gramophone pin and a cycle bell as his weapon to kill his victims at 50 yards, and the pin manages to pierce the hearts. By what standards of rationality can one hide a diamond in one’s throat in Raktamukhi Neela? Bhujangadhar of Chiriakhana is a plastic surgeon from London who can hide a cyanide capsule under his tongue... There are numerous mythical, outrageous, fantasy elements in the Byomkesh stories.” (“Anjan to Dibakar”, *The Telegraph Online*)

Another layer is added by the Brechtian theatre-like representation of the psychological inner play of the detective (in Hoichoi’s *Byomkesh O Pinjrapole*, 2023, under the direction of Sudipto Roy) as he rationally unveiled the criminal’s mind, breaking away from the traditional dramatic convention of linear plot and fourth wall convention of the stage involving and confronting the audiences of Byomkesh with uncomfortable questions that he places before them.

We know that Sharadindu was a lawyer by profession, who practised in colonial Bengal for some time before he became a full-time writer. Thus, it is logical that Byomkesh would refrain from expressing his political affiliations (especially in the first half of his pre-independence stories). Even when he did express his non-alignment with the colonial rule in the post-independence story of “Adim Ripu” his action (in burning the currency hand-notes in front of Prabhat) were more vocal than his words. But was it possible for Byomkesh to not have a political opinion, being the educated and socially conscious young man of his time (even in private)? Ajit, the chronicler of the first few stories of Byomkesh, was also an author from Sharadindu’s own time, who equally needed the sanction of the colonial government to publish his narratives, just as Sharadindu. Thus, if he avoided incorporating Byomkesh’s political opinions in his narrative to avoid a ban on his literary works under the vigilance of the British government, he could not be blamed much, could he? Further, even in the post-independence situation, we learn through the narration of Ajit (as well as Sharadindu) that Byomkesh had made friends with important names in the national political forum, like Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel, and was equally at ease in working out the issues of national interest under his guidance. But was he not aware of the fallen institutional dreams and broken promises that the native government had disillusioned the newly enfranchised Indians with- both at the state and national level? How could Byomkesh remain silent about it? Probably both Ajit and Sharadindu washed him clean of his true opinions to avoid a gaging of their literary ventures once again, keeping in mind the barrage of bans that the newly selected Prime Minister of India was imposing on voices that would dare oppose its rule. However, the contemporary directors who have taken up the cause of representing Byomkesh and his time are more empowered and free from such political obligations in this age of free speech and detailed media coverage. Moreover, they not only opine on Byomkesh and his moves but also observe Ajit and Sharadindu as they talk about Byomkesh, from a distance. Thus, they often fill up this gaping hole in the literary narratives of Byomkesh by making him a Naxal sympathiser and a ‘Mukti Joddha’ supporter at the same time, as in director Sayantan Ghoshal’s 2019 film ‘Satyanweshi-Byomkesh’, and we don’t find it imposed. Neither do we blame Anirban Bhattacharya’s

Byomkesh when he grows increasingly frustrated and vocal about the contemporary political scenario of Churchill-induced man-made famine of Bengal (1943) in “Dushto Chakra”, or Rddhima’s Satyabati when she willfully leaves the cosy shelter of her house to collect funds for the famine-stricken populace of Bengal. Can we blame the director Soumik Halder too, if he discovered a covert freedom-fighter in the shrouded character of Abhay Ghoshal, amidst the various charges of unproved criminal allegations in an attempt to pin him down? As a resulting logic, this becomes a more viable reason behind scrupulous money-lender Bishu Pal’s fear of him in the days of famine and anarchy that contemporary Bengal witnessed.

Again, in the hands of filmmaker Arindam Sil, Byomkesh (*Byomkesh Pawrbo*, 2016) appeared in a new avatar and performed daredevil stunts under the guidance of a special technical team flying down from Mumbai and Chennai to keep up to common taste. He further conceived the unthinkable by incorporating an item dance by Sayantika Banerjee choreographed by none other than the famous Saroj Khan. “In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly”, says Laura Mulvey in *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975), speaking of the commercial viability of a film with the intention to exploit the standard sexual depravity in people. Sil seems to adhere to this trope with surer conviction than to percolate into the intricacies of Sharadindu’s women as they were written. Cinema offers a number of possible pleasures. One is scopophilia. There are circumstances in which looking itself is a source of pleasure, just as, in the reverse formation, there is pleasure in being looked at. Originally, in his *Three Essays on Sexuality* (1905), Freud isolated scopophilia as one of the component instincts of sexuality which exist as drives, quite independently of the erotogenic zones. At this point he associated scopophilia with taking other people as objects, subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze. His particular examples centre on the voyeuristic activities of children, their desire to see and make sure of the private and the forbidden (curiosity about other people’s genital and bodily functions, about the presence or absence of the penis

and, retrospectively, about the primal scene). In this analysis, scopophilia is essentially active within the mind of the director but a transfer of it, even if partially, can warrant a quicker route to box-office business. The numerous sidereal camera angles at Sohini Sarkar's *Satyabati* when capturing a moment of intimacy reveals Sil's commercial sensibility to render the audience the scopophilic pleasure of being a voyeur to Byomkesh and *Satyabati*'s conjugal banter.

However, what these necessary changes bring about in the composition of Byomkesh and his world is the serious compromise with the *bhadralok* ideals that were otherwise integral to Byomkesh, the literary figure, as conceived by Sharadindu Bandhopadhyay. Byomkesh was nevertheless an ideal Bengali *bhadralok* who was often called to unveil the rogues who snugly operated with their criminal intentions from under the apparent cover of their *bhadralok* veils. These criminals were the rare minority in Sharadindu's contemporary times and made it difficult for Byomkesh to catch them based on a very careful study of their subtle nuances, slight digression from the ideals, or minute slips in their elaborate plans. But the contemporary generation, as diagnosed by Parimal Ghosh in his seminal work *What Happened to the Bhadralok* does not feel obliged to follow the ideals of a *bhadralok* in their challenging existence in the contemporary world. So, the modern theatre avatars of Byomkesh have the more intensified challenge of pointing out the most heinous perpetrator amidst the barrage of scoundrels who surround him, to find any relevance in the modern world. Bringing Byomkesh out of his period-existence would take him to oblivion altogether, thus the directors have all agreed more or less to keep Byomkesh out of the modern-day settings. However, most of the characters around Byomkesh have started behaving in a way coloured by Post-Modern expectations. Consequently, the ruffians who would be sobered when standing in the aura of Byomkesh's subtle but firm resolve and impeccable persona in his days, now in the contemporary theatres come across in their completely fiendish and ruffian avatars before him without any qualms. If the modern audience is not ready to give Byomkesh any points for his *bhadralok-satyanweshi* embodiment, why should the ruffians bother either? If it is no grace to be a *bhadralok* anymore, it should be no shame to be a *chhotolok* either- at least not so

when the pretentious *bhadralok-samaj* has already ostracised them. Thus, Shiuli (played by Swastika Mukherjee) the aspiring singer, who had crossed over to India from East Pakistan with her family during the partition of India in “Adim Ripu”, can very well endorse her role as a bar-singer in Anjan Dutt’s *Byomkesh Bakshi* (2010) and voice her displeasure curtly when Byomkesh intrudes too much into her life. She can also nonchalantly admonish Byomkesh, who according to her has no business in questioning her choice of Anadi Halder over Prabhat or for that matter, Gajananda at the end. She, unlike her literary counterpart, has been given a voice as well as an agency to come up to the so-called *bhadralok* gathering- along with Byomkesh, and state in the climax that she would prefer a criminal (and a *chhotolok*) Gajananda as her partner over any other *bhadralok* of the society who would dare thwart her dreams to be an actress and a singer, and try to tame her into a trophy-wife.

However, we must here acknowledge the fact that Dutt’s Byomkesh, unlike his literary original, also crossed the line of a *bhadralok* in directly intruding into Shiuli’s life instead of observing her from a comfortable distance that allowed the literary Byomkesh to maintain his dignity. Probably, the confrontation of the *bhadralok* and the *chhotolok*, which the modern world has normalised, has made it difficult for the director Anjan Dutt to avoid in his script. Similarly, Gajananda does not shy away from pointing his pistol at Byomkesh when he behaves too loosely, bordering on flirting, with Shuli during his investigation. Why should a goon bother to act differently with a person who is looking at his girl from a common male gaze, that a woman of Shuli’s status in the film would encounter every other day?

Once again Gargi Roy Chowdhury’s Sukumari in *Satyanweshi Byomkesh* (2019) is a ghazal-singer aligning her closer to the *bajji* identity than the subtle and tacit reference to the easy-going lifestyle of a Vaishnavi Kirtan-singer in Bengal during the time of Sharadindu Bandhopadhyay. This cinematic adaptation of Sukumari openly warns Byomkesh that she is adept at telling lies, while Sharadindu’s Sukumari was allowed only to testify as a false witness who corroborated Santosh Samaddar’s lies as an alibi to save him from the charges of the murder. While the literary Sukumari was heartbroken when Samaddar died at the end of the story, this

cinematic Sukumari, despite her position as a fallen woman, is shocked to learn about her lover's abysmal fall as a traitor to the nation, and suggests with a straight face that Samaddar deserves a similar fate as Heena Mullick, whom he murdered even after recognising her as his illicit child.

In this film directed by Sayantan Ghoshal, Heena Mullick, is acquitted of being an East Pakistani Spy unlike her mother Mina Mullick, who not only seduced Samaddar- an influential Indian Politician at the face of Indian Partition, but also made him divulge political information to the enemy country. She is just a blackmailer in the film, who had teamed up with her lover Omar Shirazi to leech Samaddar dry of his wealth. However in director Soumik Halder's version of the same story for the web series '*Byomkesh*' (Season 6, January 2021) Heena is not only a spy but she attains the cult status of the enigmatic double agent (German and French spy) Mata Hari (1876-1917) during World War-I (1914-1918) when Byomkesh discovers a letter in her closet where her lover addresses her as "Minu Mata Hari" Thus even Heena seems to be comfortable here in her position as a *femme fatale* which her contemporary *bhadralok* society would be disturbed to acknowledge but the modern-day audience would prefer.

This voice and agency given by the modern-day directors to the fallen women in *Byomkesh* also necessitated that the *bhadra-mahilas* around *Byomkesh* are also not devoid of an opinion. Since 'charity begins at home', who better to start this journey of emancipation other than Satyabati herself? In Sharadindu's literature, Satyabati has no major contributions to *Byomkesh*'s investigations beyond "Arthamanartham" where her testimony proved vital in solving the case and impressing *Byomkesh* as an unusually strong-willed woman. And also to some extent in "Chitrachor" where she openly and vehemently expressed her sympathy for both Rajani and Mrs. Malati Shom. Thus, complained Basu Chatterjee's Satyabati Sukanya Kulkarni (*Byomkesh Bakshi* 1993 - 1997) that her role was only confined to serving tea to *Byomkesh* and his guests. Researcher Sourav Roy noted in his article "National and Regional *Byomkesh* Bakshi in Cinema" that the first few cinematic adaptations of *Byomkesh* in the direction of Ajan Dutt, between 2010 and 2015, focused on *Byomkesh*'s domestic life, including his marriage

to Satyabati, something that was unusual in the detective genre but crucial to the character's *bhadralok* identity. Even Dutt himself insisted that his Byomkesh, "... is smarter and agile, is also far more human than other portrayals. He cries, he agonises, he exults and he feels down," ("My Byomkesh Bakshy more human than other film portrayals: Anjan Dutt", *The Indian Express*, Updated: September 22, 2016, 19:49 IST). He added in another article, that "A married detective excites me more. Very few detectives in literature are married and Byomkesh is one of the few among them." ("Dibakar's Byomkesh is punk and edgy, mine is more noir: Anjan Dutt", *Hindustan Times*, Apr 24, 2015, 05:15 PM IST). As a result, Satyabati demands more screen-time in his films. She starts by usurping some of Ajit's dialogue from Sharadindu's stories for herself and her silent protests by putting the telephone down (*Byomkesh Bakshi*, 2010 and *Abar Byomkesh*, 2012). Slowly she emerges with her exclusive dialogues to establish her presence in Byomkesh's busy life as a *satyanweshi*. Unfortunately, though in most cases she ends up cutting a sorry figure of a 'nagging wife' who appears irritatingly unreasonable in demanding Byomkesh's time at crucial junctures in his investigation, with trifle issues like taking their son Khoka to the doctor himself (*Byomkesh Phire Elo*, 2014). Even Saswata Chatterjee's Ajit has to intervene at times and tell her that her husband was no ordinary domestic and that his time was necessary to save many lives in duress and danger.

Following this template, the Arindam Sil-directed Byomkesh series (*Har Har Byomkesh*, 2015, *Byomkesh Pawrbo*, 2016, *Byomkesh Gotro*, 2018 and *Byomkesh o Hotyamoncho*, 2022) allows the actress Sohini Sarkar, playing Satyabati this time, to grab a meatier role. However, unlike Anjan Dutt's Satyabati, Arindam Sil's version of her seems more soft-spoken and understanding as a wife. Even when she is angry, she doesn't shout. Rather she chooses to protest silently. But one must understand that this Satyabati is also a younger version of the lady and is yet to be a mother as her predecessor, and undoubtedly has been incorporated to show Byomkesh in a more 'matinee-idol'-like romantic light. Nevertheless, she is a far cry from the Sharadindu Bandhopadhyay conceived character of a shy and homely wife of Byomkesh. She travels with her husband to unusual and dangerous places like the small town

Santagola in the Doors area of North Bengal during the tumultuous time of 1948 in Bengal, where the literary *bhadralok* Byomkesh would have not taken her. But Sil created unnecessary sequences like a day trip of Byomkesh and company to lengthen the leading lady's glamorous stay on screen. Film critic and blogger Ambar Chatterjee commented on Satyabati in the film and stated, "Shohini is apt as Satyaboti but I kind of find her act a bit too melodramatic." ("Ambar Chatterjee reviews- *Byomkesh Pawrbo* (2016)", Wordpress.com, April 21, 2017). Yet, in *Byomkesh Gotro* (2018), she ends up asking pertinent questions like "...why is it always that women are considered a catch by the men...at times the women can consciously step into the traps laid by men." (Self-translation from the original script in Bangla). Thus, she is also a rational person, conscious of the scope of women's agency in a male-dominated world, unlike some of her rash predecessors.

The changing tastes and preferences of the audience also allow other genteel female characters like Imon Ray, the wife of *zamindar* Himangshu Ray (Season 7 of the Hoichoi web-series) to come out of the inner quarters of the *zamindar's* house and orchestrate the ousting of a young widow from their estate on moral grounds. Though her literary avatar, as penned by Sharadindu, was a cloistered woman with no name, also demanded the same outcome but her protestations were confined to three consecutive days of fasting to coax her husband to agree with her. She not only makes frequent appearances in the episodes of this season of the web series but also speaks bitter and curt dialogues even in the presence of Satyabati, who once again accompanies her husband in this case. There is also a scene of her face-off with Satyabati, where she directly asks them to leave the estate in no indirect words. Even Satyabati retaliates with a straight face and tells her that they would not oblige until her husband- the *satyanweshi*, had discovered the truth. Cinematically, this dramatic scene would garner accolades for the heightened tension and the verbal duel between the two ladies, but practically it seems inconceivable for an early twentieth-century genteel woman to be so curt with her guest in Bengal. Moreover, Satyabati's reaction seems more absurd, as it would be equally difficult for a *bhadra-mohila* of her time to take in such an insult hurled at her husband.

Thus, we remember Parimal Ghosh (*What Happened to the Bhadrakok*) once again for bringing up the idea that it is not so important to be a *bhadrakok* in our time, nor is it important to be a *bhadra-mohila*. Nevertheless, the climax eases out the absurdity of the situation to some extent when we learn that Imon's bitterness was a direct result of her husband's infidelity and her fear of exposure in the hands of Byomkesh.

Particularly in this series, Byomkesh gets a chance to rightfully hang the Albatross of guilt on Himangshu's shoulders as he is not that morally uplifted *bhadrakok* that we observe in Sharadindu's plot. This cinematic version of Himangshu is a lecherous person who took advantage of a young widow he had sheltered in his home and impregnated her. Thus, the pangs of guilt for murdering the *dewan* Kaligati were the least punishments he deserved. Parallely, we also understand that the modern cinematic Byomkesh does not have the role of unveiling a single villain hiding behind a group of *bhadrakoks*, rather his job is to show the mirror to the multitude of pseudo-*bhadrakoks* surrounding him, as the real ones are absent. "We never look at just one thing; we are always looking at the relation between things and ourselves," says John Berger in *Ways of Seeing* (1972). Echoing the thought, it can be concluded that the reincarnation of Byomkesh Bakshi at the dawn of the 2010s was in a habitat starkly different from that of Basu Chatterjee's *Doordarshan* in the early Nineties. Bengal in 2010, as a people, had well become a culturally depleted wasteland with the standard mainstream entertainment narrative being "*Paglu thoda sa kar le romance*". I mention this particular line to emphasise that nothing Bangali had remained in Bengal, not even the language itself. In such a day and age, bringing back Byomkesh Bakshi onto the large-screen would be akin to resurrecting him in the garb of a superhero to a pitifully myth-less generation. So the humdrum simplicity of middle-cinema bred Byomkesh in Basu Chatterjee's iteration would never suffice. Instead we ended up getting gun-toting, suave-around-women versions of Byomkesh who could validate the encashment of cultural nostalgia to a clueless, non-reading audience. This is where and this is why, the *bhadrakok* Byomkesh thoroughly deconstructed himself into the fast-paced hero because if he did stick to being the *bhadrakok* that he was supposed to be, he may not have survived, given

that he was arguably pitted against the rampant ‘Paglu-fication’ of mainstream Bangla entertainment. The irony is Basu Chatterjee’s *Byomkesh Bakshi* was in Hindi. But the greater irony is that much like how Nietzsche’s abyss, after a while, had stared back at him, Byomkesh too was ‘Paglu-fied’ with *Byomkesh O Durgo Rahasya* in 2023.

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Transphobia and Misrepresentation: Foregrounding Latent Trans Spaces in Bollywood Films

Anshuman & Nikhilesh Yadav

Abstract

The world is interpreted as a stage, and we (people) are mere actors, where each represents a specific role and plays a character assigned to perform in a given space and time. The performance is done according to the assigned spaces, thus helping the performers to carve a niche and present themselves. Cinema is one medium that acts as a stage for many, as it is the most potent and distinct in contemporary times. It represents a multi-faceted perspective and is thus understood, recognised, and appreciated as one of the most influential mediums in the contemporary world. Indian cinema predominantly adheres to heterosexual binary narratives, thus portraying males and females. However, there has been a surge in the number of films reflecting transgender presence, albeit often in a discriminatory and transphobic manner. The idea of space for a transgender individual and the complex relationship between transphobia and the misrepresentation of these identities in select Bollywood films remain the main idea of the paper. The research paper crystallises the debate on trans ‘spaces’ in Bollywood films, their representation and phobia, thus examining the plots, roles assigned, cinematic portrayals, and dialogues referring to the transgender existence in one way or another. The study focuses on how these portrayals are disseminated and dislocated through reference to specific films and their misrepresentation in mainstream cinema, thus questioning the pervasive stereotypes and biases that fuel societal transphobia.

Keywords: Binary, Cinema, Mockery, Disgust, Gender Identity, Transphobia, Heterosexual.

I

The sense of fear has a strange sort of dynamism that percolates very deep in human psyche and in myriad ways it is central to human understanding of life and a great deal of human resource, imagination, and energy is invested in training humanity about fear. This sense of fear is divisive in nature and goes about deploying fear almost everywhere in an instinctual manner onto those marked as different. When all humanity suffers from fear, it is but natural that majoritarian will marks all sorts of minorities as sources of fear whose sway in distant future will unleash a clash in society beyond the control of majority community. 'Transgender' is one such minority that is stigmatised for possessing arsenals far more dangerous than nuclear warheads with their supposedly shrouded manners and ways of life so much so that their voices remain unheard in great democracies of the world and even in oldest living civilisations on the planet. The chasm between the foot soldiers of heteronormativity, teeming in a nation like India, and those with their own preferences for leading their life as they deem fit, a minuscule of Indian population, is too wide not due to numerical divide alone, but is compounded when we find the former ready to reap benefits of technology to heap abuses on a mind-boggling scale. When (trans) phobia multiplies exponentially, in the company of ultra-modern computing machines, a ubiquitous dynamism gathers momentum, pushing modern nation-states into the abyss of then Dark Ages, and chaos prevails, forcing minority (transgender) to flee, hide, or albeit for a shorter duration. This chaos leads to discontent among the crowd, which further leads to the question of belief. The human beings are afraid of trusting which further leads to classification in order to relate. This division raises the misinterpretation and leads to the rise of misinformation which perpetuates negative stereotypes and persistently fuels hatred, which further marginalises the one already living on the fringes and affects them disproportionately on several levels, for instance, in education, social, health care and employment sector, etc. A society which is an aggregate of innumerable beings living together is predominantly parted into sharp divide of two genders which fall into hierarchal heteronormative category along with the section of nonbinaries, the minorities falling under the

queer umbrella. The minorities sustaining discrimination in all parts of the world operate with desires and fear, which is the dominant factor on which phobia operates. The phobia pertaining to the existence, visibility and acceptability leads to the division between the binaries and non-binaries, which, if presented by a strong medium such as cinema in discriminatory manners, leads to the fostering of hate, fear and feelings of disgust about those who have marked ‘different’, thus snatching the spaces of trans existence.

II

India, Transphobia and Transitions

India has a long association with one of the oldest ethnic Hijra communities for whom the arrival of colonial rule in India proved to be a catastrophe. Although the idea of ‘space’ for those identifying as non-binaries was never alien to Indian people, it is pertinent to note that their presence has been documented in several ancient and historical texts. During the 19th Century, the Criminal Tribes Act, enacted by the British Government in India, criminalised non-procreative sexualities and targeted transgender persons, including eunuchs and hijras, thus paving the way for prejudice and posing them a threat to society with a label of being habitual offenders or criminals, leading to transphobia amongst the general population of Northern India predominately.

Initially targeting the tribal communities, CTA included several provisions limiting transgender rights and those gender non-conforming individuals. The special target on ‘eunuchs’ and their categorisation led to the exclusion of these communities from the mainstream. It is pertinent to mention that the ‘eunuch’ was used as a catchall term for referring to all those genders non-confirming be it hijras, khwajasaras or Kotis. The further categorisations as respectable or suspicious also divert the attention towards structured transphobia curated to target the identities who were labelled to be engaged in kidnapping, castration, wearing feminine attires or sodomy although no such information is available about such events. As noted, “The experience of being recorded on a district register was hardly a positive or agential one for ‘eunuchs’ – their entry into the colonial archive marked their criminalisation” (Hinchy 3).

Transphobia understood as a phobia arising from hatred, prejudice, negative attitude or dislike, etc., reflects the inner sentiments, emotions and perceptions towards those who do not fall into the heterosexual categories or binaries and identify as one from the transgender community. Transphobia existed in the time of the British Raj as hatred and misinformation spread amongst people, even in those times when the country was not acquainted with digital media, leading to a suspected image of these identities, which fetched ostracism and marginalisation of those identifying themselves as transgender, hijras or eunuchs. The perception about transgender population, especially those belonging to the hijra community, worsens as a plethora of misinformation is circulated through oral tales, narratives and visual media such as movies. Indian cinema, especially the majorly watched Hindi or Bollywood movies, reflects such dialogues and films that often misrepresent the Transgender community, especially Hijras. The treatment of trans individuals as a subject of mockery and disgust, along with their objectification in certain scenes, presents them in a negative light. Moreover, the ill-treatment and discriminatory behaviour of non-binaries leads to an atmosphere of discontentment and hatred, leading to an increase in violence against people who don't fall under the heteronormative mainstream population.

The existence of any transgender person is constantly questioned and often considered as a result and impact of Western thought and influence. Transphobia arises due to identity crises of the individuals who were assigned liminal spaces in pre-partition India and were viewed from the lens of the suspect. Many transgender characters have appeared in Indian cinema as comedic relief or as villains. Transgender people have been living on the periphery of society for thousands of years, and such cliched portrayals do not adequately highlight their complex lives. Although the last decade has witnessed a moderation in the depiction of trans characters, the protagonist of the movies has remained a cis-gender actor, which also counts as discriminatory. The misinformation is also spread sometimes with a social or political agenda where these minorities are targeted and thus stigmatised, which further impacts the public perception and makes it further problematic for these minorities.

The broad spectrum of themes exploring human relations in myriad ways refers to the projection of multidimensional perspectives weaved around mankind. Most of the Indian cinema has sadly focussed on the males and females as essential parts of most narratives, thus cornering the existing non-binaries, which are understood by the fact that the majority of audiences in India are dominantly parted between binaries and those falling under the non-binary umbrella are meagre in number.

However, there has been a recent surge in films focussing on non-binary individuals and non-heterosexuals in the last few years; for instance, movies *Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laga*, *Badhaai Do*, and *Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan* mainly address the concerns of gay and lesbian individuals as they navigate familial conflicts and romantic relationships, albeit in a typical Bollywood style. Albeit this depiction and positive display of several sexualities on screen, the representation of trans individuals remains majorly discriminatory. Thus, there is still a long path to cover to extend the same level of understanding and acceptance towards the transgender community, both on and off-screen.

III

The assertions towards saying that the representation of trans individuals is problematic on the Bollywood screen can be understood by the dismissive, problematic and damaging depiction which perpetuates negative stereotypes that depict the community as a whole in a derogatory and objectionable manner. Another such misrepresentation is caused by assigning the roles of transgender individuals to cisgender actors dressed in drag, who often have been shown as males dressed in feminine attires or adorning makeup and keeping long hair which further hurts the sentiments of several members of the trans community as this can be marked as snatching of 'trans spaces' from the acting industry.

The mainstream Bollywood films adhere prominently to two stereotypical templates for trans depiction – the comic relief or menacing antagonist. The representation further ostracises and stigmatises the community, resulting in stereotypical or inaccurate portrayal of these marginalised groups. For transgender individuals, this stands as discriminatory, as their experiences are often misrepresented in a way

that fails to account for the several aspects of their identity. Stereotypical portrayal is another such issue where Transgender individuals are frequently depicted through narrow stereotypes, such as the ‘tragic figure’ or ‘deceptive villain’, which do not reflect the diversity of their experiences. These misrepresentations can reinforce harmful stereotypes and contribute to societal misunderstanding and discrimination against transgender individuals.

Bollywood, at its best, has remained discriminatory and insensitive to Trans individuals who are often shown through a heterosexual lens from multiple perspectives, and the portrayal has perpetuated stereotypes by portraying them as sex workers, brothel runners, fanatics, or individuals possessing supernatural powers. The visuals portraying the Trans characters on screen produce a clown-like or masculinised feminine look with distinct body types and mannerisms, and “most of the Bollywood movies portrayed the image of transgender as an entertainer in comedy, thriller and horror movies by using fixed visual codes like loud make-up, freak applause and vulgar body movements” (Yasin et al.).

The portrayals of these identities as ‘alien’ to the majority of binary setup leads to the questioning of gender identity amongst the heterosexual population as they start visualising the trans community from a distinct frame, thus interpreting them from a negative lens. The transgender community, already living on the fringes with its popular sub-category of Hijras, which entirely run on Badhai and begging, thus becomes deeply affected as people interpret them as kidnappers due to their lack of procreative abilities. Therefore, these portrayals have an extensive impact, leading to several consequences that can profoundly influence public perception when presented through the cinematic landscape. Heterosexual dominance and the majority following the binary notions stay unaware of the transgender’s interpretation of space, which, when seen from a psychological perspective, is profoundly about acceptance and visibility. The misrepresentation on such a grand scale snatches the space of visibility of transgender population, whose roles are often presented by males disguised in feminine garbs or a male performing an effeminate female, thus shrouded under the carpet of heterosexual understanding of trans, which is often discriminatory and misunderstood.

The portrayal here not only limits the snatching of space and voice but also leads to the perpetuation of biases and fear, which further takes the face of transphobia and transmisogyny.

The misrepresentation where, on the one hand, leads to transphobia among heterosexual individuals; it also affects the self-perception of transgender individuals as it prompts them to think and describe themselves as presented in the films. Moreover, transphobic words and slurs also affect identity and perceptions; for instance, Hijra is a reference word to indicate persons who identify themselves as transwomen belonging to the oldest ethnic community of India. The usage of the word 'hijra' as a slur or derogatory term to indicate effeminate, impotent or feminine males remains a common practice in films. The misrepresentation often leads to the perpetuation of fear and biases about transgender individuals, which takes the face of transphobia.

To have a detailed and extensive understanding, here are a few roles where several hijras, and transwomen characters are represented in a transphobic manner:

Trans characters as Abductors and Extremists:

The misrepresentation of Transgender individuals as members of cults or fervent religious adherents has frequently been a part of depiction in Bollywood movies. The representations led to stereotyping transgender people as aberrant, harming or threatening individuals as depicted in the film '*Sangharsh*' (1999), in which the protagonist Ashutosh Rana is portrayed as a transwoman who abducts children for sacrificial purposes driven by her religious fanaticism. The linking of her gender identity as a practitioner of violent extremism reinforces the damaging stereotypes amongst spectators.

Transgender Individuals as Murderers:

Trans depiction as murderers or psychopaths, as in '*Sadak*' (1991) fetches negative criticism and creates a sense of fear amongst the public. In the film, Sadashiv Amrapurkar as Maharani, a Hijra/eunuch is shown running a brothel and engaged in sex trafficking. The character is not only presented as a sadistic one, but the depiction has been

extremely discriminatory thus reinforcing the idea that transgender community is inherently malevolent.

Transgender Characters as Laughing Stocks:

Trans Individuals have often been portrayed as objects of ridicule, which is the most damaging and often-used stereotype. The consistent portrayal of comic relief and side characters perpetuates harmful biases. In the film, *Masti* (2004), Rakhi Sawant plays the role of Ms. Saxena, a trans woman becomes the butt of jokes. The discriminatory scene reflects her urinating while standing dehumanises the individuals and reinforces the idea that transgender people are grotesque or absurd. In 2001, *Nayak: The Real Hero*, Johnny Lever plays a character who uses derogatory terms such as 'chakka' for anyone who pokes him in his waist. Simultaneously, there are several films, like '*Kya Kool Hain Hum*' and '*Style*' also follow a similar pattern, portraying trans characters as sexually predatory sidekicks and substance of ridicule.

Transgender Characters as Abusers:

The problematic portrayal of transgender individuals as abusers and harassers is often featured in Bollywood films; for reference, *Sadak* (1991) features a character of Maharani, a eunuch, who is shown running a brothel. Maharani is presented as being a part of sex trafficking and maleficent practices. A brothel owner who engages several females in sex trafficking, including Pooja, the protagonist of the film. The portrayal fetches phobia and suspicion, which leads to the stigmatisation of the whole trans community.

Transgender Characters as Drunkards:

The portrayal of Trans characters as drunkards, alcoholics or substance abusers remains the major cause of the image stigmatisation. While these portrayals are not as prevalent, they still reinforce negative stereotypes as in the 1997 film, *Tamanna*, a trans woman named Tikku is shown having an addiction to alcohol. Several other movies also show trans characters involved in alcoholism.

Transgender Characters as Gangsters/Criminals:

The transgender trope reflected as gangsters or criminals is another negative stereotype. As presented in *Murder 2* (2011), played by Dheeraj Pandey. The antagonist is shown as a serial killer, who is portrayed as a Eunuch. The portrayal isolates the individuals from the mainstream, thus leading to stigmatised perception of community.

Transgender Characters as Sex Workers:

The most pervasive stereotype, perhaps, is that of transgender especially transwomen being sex workers. Bollywood has consistently portrayed them as sex workers or owners of brothels, perpetuating the idea that such a minority is inclined towards sex work as the only source of livelihood. For instance, In the 1999, film *Hawas*, the trans character is shown as a seductress and blackmailer, which creates transphobia.

The misrepresentation leads to several tangible consequences which leads to the exclusion of transgender communities from the mainstream. The stigmatisation leads to discrimination, violence, trans bashing and limited opportunities due to social prejudices. The harmful stereotypes perpetuated by Bollywood films contribute to the cycle of ostracism and marginalisation.

Conclusion:

The responsibility to make a change and challenge the destructively discriminatory representations can be achieved by the positive, righteous and truthful presentation of these identities. The misrepresentation leads to snatching of the spaces in several sectors of life such as education, and employment and snatches the basic human rights of living a life of dignity. It further paralyses the round development of trans individuals as their inclusion in fields where the mainstream is present is threatened by such transphobic portrayals.

Thus, Cinema and films being a leading medium capable of making change by conveying ideas and themes, help in shaping the social perception and vision. The change makers should focus on several

aspects such as dialogue delivery, narratives and gestures while considering the repercussions and dissemination of these portrayals which might result in detrimental effects for the whole transgender community.

The filmmakers also need to move beyond the idea of demonic display of transgender individuals and rather bring forward positive, authentic and respectful portrayals, thus providing a space for transgender voices where they can also relate with the gender identity displayed on screen. The empathetic storytelling, transgender actors and trans inclusion as scriptwriters must also be considered as the empathetic storytelling reflects the rich diversity of transgender experiences which can help to dismantle the harmful myths weaved around these identities.

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The Impacts of Theatre Lighting in Play Productions

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Abstract

Displaying the stage's creative impression is aided by the lighting design and usage. This is greatly aided by the employment of a range of hues in the lighting design of the stage as well as a combination of the abilities of the stage's creative effect and presentation. Stage lighting is a crucial part of stage performances, which are an important part of the parts of stage performances that are closely related to each other and complement each other. The content, theme, goal, and structure of the performance should therefore be understood before creating the stage lighting. The aesthetic trends of stage lighting will be assessed in this study, which will also look at the significance of stage lighting for establishing atmospheric conditions, mood formation, aesthetics, and the interpretation of other elements' identities.

Keywords: Lighting Effect, Theatre Light, Play Productions, Lighting Design

Introduction

Lights are important elements in any kind of theatre play productions (Graham 2022, 139), like Classical theatre, Folk theatre, Musical Theatre, Dance Drama, Mimes etc. Theatre productions can happen in outdoor or indoor auditoriums, like an open stage or in the black box, as an important elements, natural lights or technical lights will be there always in the plays as necessity (Zhang, Halabi, Azahari, and Wu 2023, 33). History says that from the start of theatre plays, light always contributed

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to plays, when theatre started in ancient Greece, at that time Greek people used sunlight for the plays, and that is why plays mostly happened in the day time during the Greek era ((Sanni 2019, 81).

Theatre lighting has a significant impact on play performances since it is an essential component of visual narrative. Lighting does a lot more than just light up the stage; it changes the atmosphere, focusses attention, and strengthens the audience's emotional bond with the narrative (Evwierhoma and Agoha 2024, 61). According to Mr. Kanhaiya Lal Kaith was (reputed theatre director and designer of the Indian theatre industry)

“Light is the eye of theatre plays. When we are moving as a human being, we observing everything what is happening around us, we listen, we feel and we watch, but how do we feel everything around us when we close our eyes!? Just vibrations and sounds, though we are moving but we are not able to feel exactly what is happening at that time, because our eyes are closed and there is a chance of falling down. Theatre plays are like that; without light, actors, directors, singers, writers, designers will do everything, but if there are no lights, anyone wouldn't able to watch and feel, if there are no lights, what audience will see, darkness!? And what actors will do on stage!? Will they go to stage to falling down and make accidents!? There is no way to present a play without lights, in my opinion that is why light is the eye or key of theatre plays” (Kaithwas, pers. comm., May 1, 2024).

With the changes of time, along with other parts of theatre play productions new inventions came and big changes happened in lighting technology in twentieth century (Graham 2018, 197-198). The impact of lights in theatre is very crucial. Scenes are made visible to the audience through lights, emotional scenes, violent scenes, love scenes, scary scenes, comedy scenes etc. are presented to the audience through different colors of lights (Zhang, Halabi, Azahari, and Wu 2023, 35), but most of the theatre students and newcomers in this field unaware about these things. This study will highlight the impact and importance of light in theatre play productions.

Methodology

The research follows both primary and secondary data collection. Primary data was collected by conducting interviews with Mr. Ramakrishna Sabbani, who is reputed designers of the Indian film industry, and Mr. Kanhaiya Lal Kaithwas from the Indian theatre industry, who are well known and reputed designers in both the film and theatre industries. Secondary data collected by books, journals, thesis papers, and authorized websites. The Plays “Lady from the Sea” and “The Post Office” were also studied for this study.

The Impacts of Lights in Plays

Enhancing Visibility and Focus

Light’s functions include seeing, illuminating, and making things visible to the naked human eye. Actors, props, and set pieces are all visible to the audience thanks to the stage lighting (Wolf and Block 2014, 318). It clarifies the gestures, movements, and facial expressions of performers (Graham 2018, 199-200), only the things the director wants the audience to see should be shown. Lighting can be used to focus the audience’s attention by drawing their gaze exclusively to specific locations, actors, objects, and/or a set piece that may be the scene’s primary focus or emphasis (Trevor 1982, 93). Because the audience is only seeing one object at a time rather than everything, selective visibility serves the crucial function of preventing viewers from missing the significance of a particular scene (Sanni 2019, 80). Through the use of spotlights or selective lighting, light draws the audience’s attention to particular actors or parts of the set. Light builds a hierarchy in visual storytelling by highlighting significant events or activities on the stage. If we think deeply, we can see that the lighting in a production can function like a camera, because it’s showing everything to the audience’s eyes (Di Benedetto 2013, 23).

Establishing Mood and Atmosphere

Lighting sets the emotional tone of scenes. The actor, actress, and special objects may serve as assisting reinforcements for the lighting, which is therefore meant to evoke feelings and moods in a scene that

will only serve to reinforce that specific moment (Sanni 2019, 80). Warm lighting conveys joy, romance, or nostalgia, while cool or dim lighting suggests sadness, tension, or danger. Colors, intensity, and patterns influence how the audience feels during a scene (Wolf and Block 2014, 321). In order for the audience to understand the motivation of the artist to represent and/or convey through words, acts, etc., the mood aids in guiding their emotions (Graham 2022, 146-147), as an example; in the play “The Post Office” by Rabindranath Tagore, at the last scene when the little boy Amal dies in bed, there are no clear speeches to Sudha that Amal died, but when the light is dimming gradually from brightened the situation turned into pathetic, audience able to understand that the little boy Amal is no more and there are Pin drop silences in the scene and when the lights off for long time, then audience understands the ends of the play. Flickering lights simulating a storm or fire, creating tension or chaos can be examples also. So, lights also work to create emotions in audience’s mind and create atmosphere in a play production.

Depicting Time and Place

Lighting simulates the time of day, location, or season. Sunrise, sunset, and nightfall are conveyed through color transitions and light direction (Di Benedetto 2013, 5-7). Lighting effects; like moonlight, sunlight, or candlelight, transport the audience to specific environments. The spring lighting design alternates between soft light and green light to evoke the warmth of spring, perhaps making the experience pleasant and joyful for all who encounter it. Winter landscapes may enhance the viewer’s perception of the coldness of winter by utilizing hues from the colder end of the color wheel. The results will result from varying the color shading’s brightness (Zhang, Halabi, Azahari, and Wu 2023, 36). According to Mr. Ramakrishna Sabbani (Reputed Production Designer of the Indian film industry),

“We also did smallest theatre production in FTII as the class production during our course, theatre play design is always a big challenge to show many things and scenes only in one place. Light has a big impact on it, to do fulfill the target of a theatre play, after completing the stage or scene design, we needed to focus on light, because without that the

audience wouldn't understand when the day scene is coming, when the night scene is coming, which scene is about indoor and which one is about outdoor. Lights are helpful in this matter, perfect lighting following with scenes' time and place can make a play very enjoyable and will give satisfaction to audience's eye but a poor-quality lighting can destroy the whole play, which is why lighting is one of the most important and key elements of theatre productions" (Sabbani, pers. comm., April 27, 2024).

Furthermore, employing a variety of lighting colors may enable stage performances transcend the boundaries of time and space and more successfully create the impression that time and space are merging together. Example; establishing or changing the scene's position in space and time, oranges and reds can evoke sunrises or sunsets, while blues can evoke night scenes (Evwierhoma and Agoha 2024, 61-62). On the other hand, mechanical filters, or "gobos," can be used to project images of the sky, the moon, etc.

Creating Depth and Supporting Scene Transitions

Lighting adds dimensionality to flat sets. Strategic use of shadows, highlights, and backlighting creates depth and realism (Fantappiè 2023, 18). Lighting helps to differentiate layers of the stage, such as foreground, middle ground, and background, for example: cross-lighting actors from the sides enhances their three-dimensionality. Lighting bridges the gap between scenes or change of locations. Smooth transitions (fade-in/fade-out) maintain the flow of the narrative. Dramatic shifts can signal significant story changes or shocks (Graham 2022, 149), for example: a blackout between scenes can create suspense or mystery.

Enhancing Symbolism and Supporting Special Effects

Lighting can convey abstract concepts and deeper meanings. Symbolic use of colors, pattern, and intensity communicates themes or character states (Zhang, Halabi, Azahari, and Wu 2023, 34), for example; a single spotlight on a lone actor might symbolize isolation or vulnerability. Lighting is integral to creating dramatic effects. Simulates natural phenomena like lightning, fire, or rain. Enhancing magical or surreal scenes using strobe

lights, projections, or lasers (Sanni 2019, 79). Example: Gobos project patterns like leaves, windows, or swirling clouds onto the stage.

Establishing Style and Genre and Immersing the Audience

Lighting reflects the aesthetic or stylistic choices of the production. Different lighting styles align with genres, like dramatic shadows for a mystery, vibrant colors for musicals (Zhang, Halabi, Azahari, and Wu 2023, 36), as example: abstract lighting in avant-garde theatre vs. realistic lighting in a naturalistic play. Lighting creates a connection between the audience and the performance. Dynamic and interactive lighting, such as projections or immersive light displays, draws the audience into the story. Audience members feel like part of the world being depicted, enhancing engagement (Evvierhoma and Agoha 2024, 60-61). Example: Simulating flickering firelight across the theatre for a campfire scene.

Supporting Actor Performances and Building Drama

Performers' visibility and presence are improved by lighting. By highlighting performers at pivotal points, you can make sure that the audience will connect with their actions and feelings (Salzberg and Kupferman 2018, 1). An actor's performance can be enhanced by creative lighting, such as backlighting to give a character a heroic or threatening appearance. Suspense and emotional tension are produced by lighting. Unexpected lighting changes, such as flashes or blackouts, might startle or startle the audience (Poland 2015, 35). Dramatic or horror scenarios are made more unsettling by dim or flickering lighting, and building suspense during a scene can be achieved by gradually lowering the lighting (Truong and Venkatesh 2001, 61).

Enhancing the Effects of Other Production Visuals

Stage lighting draws attention to the set, clothing, and mise-en-scene. In addition to allowing the audience to see what is happening on stage, well-executed stage lighting unifies all of the production's visual components (Gillette 1987, 288). The entire set, the performers in costume, the objects, and the stage makeup should all be illuminated when it comes to lighting design. This is because everything on stage will have an impact on the audience, thus it is important that everything

be visible and emphasized. Lighting gives flexibility to otherwise fixed stage designs. Transforms simple sets into multiple locations by changing colors, shadows, and focus, for example: a neutral backdrop can appear as a forest, a cityscape, or an interior space with different lighting effects (Schwarz 2023, 30).

Conclusion

Theatre lighting is a vital storytelling tool that improves mood, concentration, and audience participation. It is much more than just illumination. A performance's lighting design must consider a wide range of elements, such as how actors and actresses express character pictures, whether music is used, what costumes and props are used, and more. Lighting enhances the production and turns a straightforward performance into an engrossing and engaging spectacle by influencing the audience's visual and emotional experience. The audience can have a smooth and harmonious creative experience if these different components are expertly coordinated with the stage. Therefore, lighting is the main element of a theatre play productions to be visible and understandable on stage.

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Elements of Narrative Technique in Cinematic Adaptation: A Study of *Raazi*

Anju & Amrita

Abstract

Adaptation is the process of transposing a particular work from one medium to another resulting in new creation. Generally speaking, a film adaptation is a kind of derivative work which is partly or wholly based on certain literary work, music, stage play or a video game. The adaptation of literary works into cinematic productions has been a longstanding tradition in filmmaking, presenting a unique challenge of translating written narratives into visual storytelling. This paper uncovers the dynamic interplay between the literary work “Calling Sehmat” by Hariender Sikka and its cinematic adaptation “Raazi” by Meghna Gulzar. The thought which flashes in the mind is — Can an espionage thriller inspire the real events of war and an unsung heroine? Is it possible to use a theoretical lens provided by Linda Hutcheon and other related theories regarding cinematic adaptation? Through a comparative analysis of the novel and its film adaptation, this study examines how narrative elements are utilized to convey the story offering valuable insights.

Keywords: *Adaptation, Creative Transformation, Motion Picture, Film Studies, Narration, Fiction*

Introduction:

Literature and film are two different medium of storytelling sharing unique similarity of transporting its readers/ audiences to a different world of their own. These expressive medium unfurl creativity of human minds and experiences in their own distinct way. To be more precise,

literature communicates through printed words on paper while film vines by visual and aural medium. Linda Hutcheon (2006) describes the movement from literature to films as a movement from telling to showing. Literature has always enriched and inspired films to gain insight and substance since the onset of the film industry. Therefore, adaptations of different literary genres have been translated into box office hits in different film industries. To talk of a precedence— An episode from Charles Dicken's *Oliver Twist* has been placed in the movie *The Death of Nancy Sykes* (1897). The earliest examples come from the work of George Melles (1861-1938). He released two adaptations viz *Cinderella* (1898) which is based on the Brothers Grimm's story of the same name and *King John* (1899) the first known film to be inspired by the works of William Shakespeare. According to Morris Beja's estimation, adaptations have won three-fourths of the Oscars for best picture since the first Academy Awards. The screenwriter Benjamin Glazer (1887-1956) received an Oscar for adapting *Seventh Heaven* (1927) based on the play with same title by Austin Strong. All five nominations in Academy Awards 2003 were literary adaptations including the best picture. In the succeeding year four out of five nominations were adaptations which won Oscars (qtd. in Desmond and Hawkes 83-84). This certainly creates an interest to understand how has fiction inspired filmmakers for adaptations?

By 1908 cinema shifted its focus towards storytelling. So, when film production companies needed material to meet demand, they switched to short stories, novels and dramas because readymade scenes, plots, universal themes and characters were easily available. It was an easy task to adapt existing stories and plays rather than to invent new scenarios. Another reason for adaptation has been to borrow literature's prestige for the new art form. Adaptations could breathe new life into classic stories by introducing them to new audiences and offering fresh perspectives on timeless tales. Adaptation of classic literary works has been a marketing device since the inception of cinema that exhibitors used to draw the middle class to experience familiar stories in new and exciting ways. Adapting prestigious authors like Shakespeare, Tolstoy, Dickens and Hugo has been a way to achieve a kind of legitimacy for

film going. The accepted notion that the purpose of motion pictures was to teach the masses about their literary heritage has been another reason for adaptation.

To reiterate, a film adaptation is the transfer of a printed literary text into a film. John Ellis in *The Literary Adaptation: An Introduction* (1982) defines adaptation as “a process of reducing a pre-existent piece of writing to a series of functions: characters, locations, costumes, actions and strings of narrative events” (3). Adaptation involves interpretation and translation of original work with some modifications to suit the conventions and constraints of the new medium. It can take many forms, from faithful reproductions that closely follow the original text to more creative reinterpretations that diverge significantly from the source material. Some adaptations aim to capture the essence and spirit of the original work, while others take liberties to explore new angles or address contemporary issues. However, adapting literature comes with its own challenges. Translating the intricacies of language, symbolism, and inner thoughts found in literature to visual or performative mediums can be a daunting task. Despite these challenges, literature continues to inspire adaptations, sparking creativity and innovation in the entertainment world.

Adaptations are sourced from all literary genres but it is estimated that novels have the lion’s share because half of all of the cinematic adaptations are from them. The Soviet film theorist, Sergei Eisenstein (1898-1948) claims that film methods such as montage, dissolve, close-up, pan, fade-out, flopping, parallel action, camera switching back and forth owe debt to narrative techniques used by Charles Dickens. The classics like *A Christmas Carol*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Moby Dick* etc were initially adapted because they were already known to public. Therefore, it is not out of place to mention that a film adaptation is the art of transfer of a work, in whole or in part, into a feature film. It may use novels, plays, short stories, autobiographical works, comic books, historical sources, videos or other films as source for their basis. Michael Klein and Gillian Parker classifies approaches to adaptation in three parts — **close** i.e. an adaptation that literally translates the text into the language of film, **intermediate** i.e. an adaptation that retains the core structure

of the narrative while significantly reinterpreting the source text and **loose** i.e. an adaptation that regards the source merely as raw material, simply the occasion for an original work (Desmond and Hawkes 3).

Most theorists [cf. Linda Seger (1992), Millicent Marcus (1993), Murray Smith (1995), Kamilla Elliott (2003)] believe themes, characters, separate units of story, and point of view can be adapted from one media to another. Theme is the easiest element of any story to be adapted. Characters too can be transported; Murray Smith has argued, “characters are crucial to the rhetorical and aesthetics effects of both narrative and performance texts” (Hutcheon 11). The separate units of story can also change in process of adaptation leading to major differences because a story can be summarized in digest versions, translated into another language, plot, and sequence of episodes and pacing. Point of departure or contact can be totally disfigured in the process of adaptation. Linda Hutcheon states: “Adaptation is a derivative work — one based on one or more pre-existing works but recast, transformed” (9).

It is interesting to note, Theo Herman (1985) the Belgian scholar in translation studies who has explored the notion of “translation as rewriting” and the dynamic relationship between source and target texts. He emphasizes the transformative nature of translation, highlighting how translators inevitably reshape and reinterpret the original text to make it accessible to a new audience in a different cultural and linguistic context. In the context of adaptation, Herman’s ideas can be applied to understand how adaptations involve a similar process of rewriting and reimagining the source material for a new medium or audience. Like translation, adaptation entails a negotiation between fidelity to the original text and creative reinterpretation to suit the conventions and constraints of the new medium. He also discusses the concept of “norms” in translation, which refers to the social, cultural, and linguistic conventions that shape the translator’s choices. Similarly, adaptations are guided by norms specific to the target medium and audience, influencing decisions about characterization, narrative structure, and thematic emphasis. He believes that adaptation also suffers from normative and source-oriented approaches.

If the literary artist is viewed as uniquely gifted creative genius, adorned with profound insight and mastery on language along with naively romantic concepts of artistic genius, originality, creativity and aesthetic excellence, then, translation would be treated with barely veiled condescension. It sounds even more true because any conventional approach to literary adaptation starts from the assumption that translated/adapted works are not only second hand but also generally second rated. (Herman, 1985)

In the light of the above investigating Harinder Sikka's *Calling Sehmat* (2018) which deals with life of a young Kashmiri Muslim girl who goes to Pakistan as an Indian spy and her life thereafter, certainly would provide a springboard for empirical research. Harinder Sikka, a former Lieutenant Commander in the Indian Navy has penned two female centric novels; both based on the true stories i.e. *Calling Sehmat* and *Vichhoda: in the shadow of longing...* (2019).

In an interview Harinder Sikka shares journey of his book *Calling Sehmat*. He says that it commenced from a point when he heard the sentence "My mother wasn't a traitor" (Bagchi) from Samar Khan at Kargil army mess. He was told by Samar Khan the story of his mother's act of courage and valour by Sehmat Khan which pierced Sikka's soul from within. It took him eight years to finish the book with intense research and interaction with the real life female protagonist of the work. The novel is his homage to the unsung heroine, who sacrificed and risked much in life out of sheer love for her *Watan* (country).

Calling Sehmat:

Unfolding, the novel *Calling Sehmat* was published on 4 April in 2008. The book was revised and subsequently published on May 14, 2018 by Penguin Random House India. The novel contains twenty-four chapters along with a prologue and an epilogue in 256 pages. Written in the past tense and in a descriptive style, the novel has all the contours of patriotism. In addition, romance, sacrifice, warfare, philosophy and resilience certainly add more colour to the story. Sikka never resigns from engaging suspense and thrill until the last word of the novel.

Calling Sehmat is an espionage thriller set in backdrop of 1971 of India and Pakistan; a saga of a young and beautiful Kashmiri girl, Sehmat Khan who is born to a Kashmiri Muslim father Hidayat Khan and a Punjabi Hindu mother Tejashwari Singh. Sehmat is studying in college when she learns of her patriotic father's impending death from cancer. As a part of his final wish, he proposes Sehmat to marry a Pakistani army officer Captain Iqbal Syed, the son of his friend who is a high ranking Pakistani armed officer (Brigadier Sheikh Sayeed) himself. He intends to place Sehmat as an undercover operative agent within Pakistani army household and she surrenders. After carrying out her mission successfully in Pakistan, she decides to settle in Malerkotla. The novel details journey of her life in the village and how she overcomes through emotional breakdown and ultimately, becomes a respected figure in the village due to her uncanny intelligence and solution to every problem. The story is narrated by Samar Khan, Sehmat Khan's son who severed in Indian Army but took premature retirement and he is now working for an NGO which helps in the development of underprivileged children, especially around Malerkotla.

The real-life story of this novel inspired Meghna Gulzar, the writer and director, to create and transform *Calling Sehmat* into the motion picture *Raazi* which was released in May 11, 2018. Not only she bagged Filmfare Award for Best Director for the movie *Raazi* but also another marvel directed under her hat is *Talvaar* (2015). *Raazi* literally translates to Sehmat Khan's agreement to her father's final wish and she is placed as an Indian spy within the Pakistani army household which turns her life upside down.

The blogs have been replete with remarks: “*Calling Sehmat* recounts how one girl saved INS Vikrant” (Almas Khateeb, 2018), “*Calling Sehmat* is a story of immense courage and sacrifice by a Kashmiri Muslim woman, Sehmat Khan” (Alaknanda, 2018) and “The movie has not been different from the book justifying the changes as the creator's artistic license” (Dhar, 2019). The buzz of release of this movie *Raazi* has been promoting viewers to read the novel.

If anyone wishes to adapt a literary work of fiction into a movie, one

is bound to brainstorm, to look into the outline of the novel as well as movie's log line and screenwriting. The adaptation should converge a novel's outline into a screen play's outline also. Besides, another major aspect shall be, not just thinking in words but visualization about creating scenes for the screen and actual acquisition of the plot with fidelity to characteristics of fiction and various narrative techniques. This is the right juncture where *Calling Sehmat* and *Raazi* can be compared. The following section investigates both the mediums i.e. printed text vs. motion picture on various paradigms:

1) Opening of the Story (Plot):

The novel and the motion picture open on a separate note. Harinder Sikka and Meghna Gulzar have used flashback as a narrative technique to tell the extraordinary tale of an ordinary Indian girl.

The novel *Calling Sehmat* opens with a prologue set in Malerkotla where Sehmat Khan has passed away in her sleep, the villagers have gathered and Samar Khan arrives in the village. He begins narrating to the villagers about a glorious past of Sehmat Khan (his mother) chronologically, the unsung Indian spy who single-handedly ravaged Pakistan's security system. Subsequently, Sehmat's story unrolls in chapters from her parents first meeting in Srinagar to their marriage, her birth, her college life, her marriage to son of a Pakistani General, her transferring information across the border, her return to India after successfully carrying out her mission and later, settling in Malerkotla. On the contrary, the movie *Raazi* opens with Nikhil Bakshi; standing at the podium at the shore of Arabian Sea in 2016. The Indian officer is addressing group of soldiers about 1971 India-Pakistan war and India's victory. He says that senior officers who have witnessed the war could never forget the sacrifices not only of those who fought on the front but also of those who helped our soldiers away from front that are spies of our intelligence bureau. He especially mentions a twenty year old girl who crossed every limit. Samar Syed (Sehmat's son) among the audience is also listening.

2) Setting (Backdrop):

Setting serves as the backdrop against which the story unfolds. It

includes time, physical environment, such as geographical location, historical period and cultural atmosphere. *Calling Sehmat* and *Raazi* are set primarily in India and Pakistan against the backdrop of the 1971 Indo-Pakistani War, heightening the stakes for Sehmat Khan as she carries out her mission.

A string of locales can be traced in the novel i.e. Srinagar- New Delhi- Srinagar- Pakistan- Malerkotla. To be more precise, chapter 1 and 2 are set in the valley of Srinagar detailing Hidayat and Tejashwari life and also focuses on Sehmat's upbringing (chapter 2); to and fro movement is seen in chapter 3 to 7 when Sehmat goes to attend college from Khan's house to New Delhi and back to Srinagar. From chapter 8 onwards, Sehmat is seen shifting to Pakistan after her marriage to Captain Iqbal Sayeed and carrying out her mission till chapter 17. In chapter 18, she is grandly welcomed back in India and later, decides to stay in Malerkotla. Chapter 18 to 21 deals with Indian soldiers who fight the war against Pakistan and become victorious though with casualties. Chapter 22-24 details Sehmat's life after settling in Malerkotla and ends with an epilogue.

On the other hand, *bird's eye* camera shots (or an *overhead* shot is a camera angle that is taken from a high, elevated position, looking down on subject providing scenery details) rolls into action at the Arabian Sea where Nikhil Bakshi addresses Indian soldiers. Subsequently, using *fading* as an editing technique (which slowly ends a scene), the scene syncs into flashback with green landscapes and then, the frame shifts to West Pakistan in 1971 where Brigadier Parvez Syed is conducting a meeting and warns to keep an eye on Khalid Mir, the high ranking official of Indian Intelligence Bureau. Using *J cut* editing technique (here, the audio from the next scene starts before the visual transition occurs), the scene further shifts to breath-taking valley of Kashmir in Hidayat Khan's house where Hidayat intends to send his daughter to Pakistan, Mir is accompanied by Nikhil. Further, the camera rolls for a *cutaway shot* (which briefly interrupts the main action or scene to show something else, often related to the primary scene) and Sehmat Khan is introduced in Delhi University and she seen receiving a call from her father and she arrives in Srinagar. Hidayat discloses about the war horns

blowing in Bengal and Pakistan's intention to cripple India so that India doesn't get involve in war, his impending death from cancer and finally his wish, Sehmat to take his place. Sehmat comes to Intelligence Bureau, New Delhi for a month where she gets trained by Mir and Nikhil Bakshi who stays with her throughout her training and the title track of the movie "*Raazi*" plays in the background illuminating Sehmat's agreement. Again in Srinagar, she is married and the scene shifts to Pakistan, montage editing technique (a series of shots and moments together into one scene) is used. She only returns to Srinagar for Hidayat's death and then she goes back to Pakistan.

As the movie approaches towards the end, Sehmat is seen returning to India after accomplishing her mission successfully. Nikhil Bakshi is seen stating that death is not only the consequence of war but sometimes casualties of war stays alive and the camera gives a *close-up shot* (which tightly frames a subject, typically focusing on a person's face or a specific detail of an object) of Samar Syed. Then, the frame shifts using *L cut* editing technique (here, the audio from the current scene continues to play even after the visual has cut to the next scene) shifts to a house away in fields, Sehmat is sitting on chair staring outside the window and in the background, a song playing with lyrics, "*Mai rahun ya na rhe koi nishaan mera, mehfoos haaton mein rhega yeh jahan mera, ae watan mere watan...aabaad rhe tu....*". Therefore, the string of sequence of locales is Arabian sea- West Pakistan- Kashmir- New Delhi- Pakistan- Kashmir- Pakistan- Malerkotla.

3) Point of View (Perspective):

Point of view refers to the perspective from which a story is narrated, whether it's first-person, second-person, third-person, or omniscient narration. It dictates who is telling the story because through the narrator, readers/audiences interpret characters, events and other important details of the narrative.

The tale of Sehmat Khan is in third-person narration in both the novel and the motion picture but it is narrated by different characters viz Sehmat's son Samar Khan in the novel while in the movie, a decorated naval officer Nikhil Bakshi who has accompanied Sehmat Khan during

her training in Intelligence Bureau, New Delhi narrates the story. Therefore, whereas the **motion picture** has a **third person narration** which is *off proximity* in familial relationships (explained below), the story of the novel though in third person narration is told *in proximity* by Sehmata's own son, Samar Khan.

When a third-person narrator employs *off proximity*, it means the narrative maintains some distance or detachment from the characters, allowing for a more objective perspective on the story's events. It refers to the degree of closeness or distance between the narrator and the characters, particularly in terms of the level of access to character's thoughts, feelings, and experiences. This distance can manifest in several ways like limited access to character's thoughts i.e. the narrator may not delve deeply into character's inner thoughts and emotions, instead focusing more on their observable actions and dialogue.

In third-person narration *in proximity* facilitates a deep sense of connection between the audience and the characters, fostering empathy and emotional investment in the story. The narrative fosters emotional engagement by immersing readers or viewers in the character's experiences, enabling them to empathize with their struggles and triumphs. The narrative may include detailed descriptions of character's sensory experiences, memories, and psychological states, creating a rich and immersive reading or viewing experience.

4) Characters:

Characters whether round or flat are the heart of any narrative. Characters are often developed with unique personalities, backgrounds, motivations, and arcs that drive the plot forward and create emotional engagement for the audience. They can be complex and multi-dimensional, with strengths, weaknesses, and internal conflicts that shape their actions and decisions throughout the narrative. They can be protagonists (the main character), major characters or minor characters who assist or hinder the protagonist's journey. Interestingly, in adaptation, characters may undergo changes to fit the conventions or constraints of the new medium, but it's essential to preserve their essential traits and arcs to maintain fidelity to the original work. In *Calling Sehmata*, protagonist is

Sehmat Khan. Brigadier Sheikh Sayeed and Captain Iqbal Sayeed are major characters. Minor characters include Hidayat Khan, Tejaswari Singh, Manav Chaudhary codenamed Mir, Abhinav Raj Singh, Abdul, Mehboob Syed, Munira, Mithali, General Officer Commanding Amir Khan, Anwar Khan, Lieutenant General Imtiaz Khan and his wife Suraiya Khan. The major characters shall be in prime focus hereafter:

Sehmat Khan is brought up in a secular environment by her Muslim father Hidayat Khan and Hindu mother Tejaswari Singh in the novel. She is greatly influenced by her father especially for his undying love for his country, India. She is a young, tall, fair skinned with sharp features girl studying in college in New Delhi. She is a natural dancer and gives dance performance as Meerabai for her college function. She falls in love with Abhinav Raj Singh but chooses her country over love when her father asks her to fill up his shoes. She excels in her training at New Delhi and later in Pakistan while performing her duty towards her nation in regularly passing on sensitive information to Indian Defense Agency (DIA) in India. She transforms herself from an ordinary college going girl to a deadly spy who displays uncanny knack for espionage skills. She boldly executes the servant, Abdul and brother-in-law, Mehboob Sayeed to safeguard her identity as spy. Though she initially feels emotionally weak after murdering them but she brushes off her emotions for the sake and commitment towards her country. She returns to her country after successfully accomplishing her mission and settles in Malerkotla, the hometown of Abdul. She sinks into depression for seven years and recovers to life again after turning towards God. Later in her life, she works for the people's welfare in the village especially women.

In *Raazi*, **Alia Bhatt** plays the role of Sehmat Khan. Gulzar has depicted Sehmat's journey as a beautiful young Kashmiri girl who makes supreme sacrifices in order to serve her motherland and goes extra mile in establishing contacts in order to retrieve more information is quite similar to the Sikka's Sehmat Khan. The alterations include that Sikka's Sehmat was much bolder and deadly spy. She did not depend on anyone to take bold step like eliminating Mehboob Syed when he was investigating Abdul's murder and her emotions were in control when she reaches Mir's safe location. Sehmat in the novel accepts causalities are

part of war but Gulzar's Sehmat questions Mir about his loyalty and humanity. Another interesting alteration is Gulzar's Sehmat plants espionage equipment in Abdul's room and shifts blame onto him whereas in the novel, she vouches against his any kind of involvement into espionage.

Brigadier Sheikh Sayeed and Hidayat Khan are college friends in the novel. They helped each other grow in their professional careers. Sayeed is a calculative man as he marries his older son Major Mehboob Sayeed to daughter of an Army General so that he can be favored during promotion and marries his younger one to Sehmat Khan as he eyed Hidayat's liquor business of which Sehmat was the sole heir. As time passes, Sheikh Sayeed becomes dependent on Sehmat to earn brownie points and secure promotion.

In the movie, Brigadier Sheikh Sayeed is named as **Brigadier Parvez Syed** (played by **Shishir Sharma**). He and **Hidayat Khan** (played by **Rajit Kapoor**) are friends. Their friendship favors India because Hidayat Khan's network plays an important role in India's victory in 1965 as well as in 1971 war. Hidayat Khan marries Sehmat to Sayeed's son so that she can carry his impending mission in the household of well-connected Pakistani Brigadier. Just like the novel, Sayeed is a cunning and calculative man who is dependent on Sehmat for his elevation in rank and personal relationships like being in good books of his immediate seniors and securing his promotion. His true colours have been portrayed vividly in the novel: he marries his elder son Major Mehboob Syed to the daughter of an Army General to secure promotion; later, marries Iqbal to Sehmat because her father helped him in arranging expensive liquor and fancy gifts for senior army officials in his parties; and most importantly, he eyed Khan's family business of which Sehmat is the sole heir.

Iqbal Syed is played by **Vickey Khaushal** in the movie. His character is quite similar to that in the novel, in terms of his love and concern for Sehmat Khan. Though, he is more emotionally expressive in the movie yet he equally depends on her for his day-to-day functioning. He gives Sehmat time to settle in the new house, their relationship to grow

swiftly and tries to enjoy Hindustani classical music over Jazz (his favorite) because Sehmat likes it. In the novel, he chooses his love over his country and in the course sacrifices his sister-in-law Munira and himself so that Sehmat Khan can have safe escape route to India while in the movie, he chooses his loyalty towards his country over his love just like Sehmat Khan.

Abhinav Raj Singh is another character in the novel who is Sehmat's first love but he is totally obliterated in the cinematic adaptation. Sehmat sacrifices her love for her father's last wish and to serve her country. He ensures that Sehmat is selected to perform Meerbai despite of College Board's opposition as she was a Muslim and therefore unfit for the role. He never marries and even fosters Sehmat and Iqbal's son Samar Khan when Sehmat is unable to attend him for seven years due to her guilt and pain. Interestingly, the movie replaces Abhinav Singh with an additional character i.e. **Nikhil Bakshi** played by Aman Vasisth (younger) and Kanwaljit Singh (older) who is a main (unseen) narrator in the movie accompanies Mir in his visit to Srinagar when Hidayat Khan wishes Sehmat to replace him and later, when Sehmat is under training in New Delhi for a month.

The characters of Hidayat Khan (Rajit Kapur), Tejaswhari Singh as Tej Khan (Soni Razdan), Manav Chaudhary codenamed Mir (Jaideep Ahlawat), Abdul (Arif Zakaria), Mehboob Syed (Ashwath Bhatt), Munira (Amruta Khanvilkar) have been placed in close parallel to the novel.

5) Theme:

A theme is a central idea, message, or insight that is explored, developed and reiterated throughout any form of artistic expression. It is the underlying concept that provides cohesion to the work and usually reflects universal truths or human experiences. In literature, themes can be expressed through characters, dialogue, symbolism, imagery, and narrative structure. Similarly, in film, themes are conveyed through storytelling techniques, music, visual symbolism, and character development. A comparative study of theme would certainly have points of contact and departure into two expressive mediums viz novel and movie.

a) Points of Contact:

The director has well anticipated the theme of patriotism and sacrifice performed by different characters. To quote a few scenes those are in close parallel in the literary text and its cinematic adaptation include:

- i. **Asking Sehmat to be a Spy:** The scene where Hidayat Khan decides that he intends Sehmat Khan to fill up his shoes as a spy. Mir is in shock to hear the news as Hidayat is willing to sacrifice his only beloved daughter in the service of the country.
- ii. **The Sayeed Family:** The family has modern outlook. All male members of the family are serving in the Pakistani army. They welcome Sehmat with love and grace into their lives and never mistreat her for being an Indian.
- iii. **Annual Function:** Sehmat goes an extra mile for the annual day function in order to establish new contacts to secure information vital for her country's safety. During annual day, when students sing patriotic song for their country prepared by Sehmat Khan, she sings along with them and tears course down her cheeks as she misses her own motherland. She sings, "Oh winds please carry a message to my beloved country...." (Sikka 73). Similarly, via *Ae Watan*, Sehmat's feelings are expressed in the movie. *Ae Watan* is a powerful song which can be termed as universal patriotic song. It is emotionally moving in the voice of Sunidhi Chauhan. It talks about one's love for the country and showcases Sehmat's feeling through it. The song also contains lyrics of the national prayer of Pakistan *Lab pe aati hai dua* in the end.
- iv. **Trust Deficit:** Neither in *Calling Sehmat* nor in *Raazi* Abdul trusts Sehmat Khan.
- v. **Murder:** Sehmat murders Abdul and later, Mehboob Sayeed to keep her identity under wrap as a spy. Mehboob comes to hospital to meet injured Abdul but he succumbs to death. Abdul's sudden death leaves questions hanging in the air and Mehboob tries to solve mystery of Abdul's death. As Mehboob's

investigation progresses, it assures Sehmat that she is in a tight spot and decides to eliminate Mehboob. The death of Abdul and Mehboob take toll on Sehmat's psyche and she feels guilty for her actions.

- vi. **Sarfraz's Shop:** Sehmat visits Sarfraz's shop and he asks her to keep the bathroom light on if she feels any kind of danger. Later at night, Sehmat mistakenly leaves bathroom light on which indicates that Sehmat needs help. Although, the name of Sarfraz is altered to Sarwar in *Raazi*.
- vii. **The Revolver:** Sehmat holds revolver pointing towards Iqbal when Iqbal learns about Sehmat's true identity as a spy. She calls Mrs. Suraiya Khan (wife of General Imtiaz Khan) to execute her escape plan.
- viii. **Mir's Disguise:** Mir disguised as Major General Bashir Ahmed visits Syed's *Haveli* to execute Sehmat's escape operation and later, he aborts the mission to rescue Sehmat when he sees Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) agents on the spot believing his game is up and there is no chance to rescue Sehmat.

b) Points of Departure:

Meghna Gulzar has edited a few scenes in the movie. These scenes are:

- i. **Hidayat's Illness:** Tejashwari was already aware of Hidayat's illness but in movie she comes to know a day before Sehmat arrives at home in Srinagar.
- ii. **Sehmat's Entry:** In the novel while walking in the park Sehmat stumbles as she mistakenly steps on baby squirrel. On the contrary, saving squirrel from coming under wheels of scooter is used as her introductory scene in the movie commenting about her delicacy and sensitivity using *close up shot*.
- iii. **Mir:** In *Calling Sehmat*, Sehmat is trained by intelligence officers and Mir meets her at the end of her training i.e. after a month but in the movie he is the one who trains her and stays with her along with Nikhil Bakshi.

- iv. **Hidayat's Death:** Hidayat Khan passes away before marrying off her daughter to Captain Iqbal Sayeed but in movie he dies after Sehmat's marriage. In fact Sehmat's even asks for his help to send some information to her father-in-law so that he can secure a promotion.
- v. **Building Trust:** In the novel, Sehmat makes an extra effort in order to win Abdul's trust.
- vi. **Sehmat's entry in Haveli:** After crushing Abdul under wheels, Sehmat enters in haveli through kitchen door in novel while via main gate in *Raazi*.
- vii. **Naval Officers:** In the movie, Mir has to convince naval officers to trust the transferred information by Sehmat Khan across the border but not in the novel.
- viii. **Pregnancy:** Sehmat's pregnancy is revealed when she is inquired by Munira whom was she calling near mosque while in *Raazi* it is revealed when she returns back to India.
- ix. **Abdul:** Sehmat Khan vouches for Abdul's integrity and loyalty in novel while in *Raazi* she holds him responsible for transferring information to India by placing her devices in his room.
- x. **Disclosure of Spy's Identity:** When Iqbal goes to bathroom, the sheepish grin on his face confirms Sehmat that her game is up. In the novel, Sehmat is confirmed when she finds few pieces of paper in Iqbal's wallet while in movie when she finds a piece of anklet in his wallet. A flashback appears on the screen; Sehmat loses the piece of anklet when she went to place devices in Abdul's room. Later, Sehmat and Iqbal go together to General Imtiaz Khan's bungalow when she is revealed as a spy to Iqbal while in movie only Sehmat goes.
- xi. **Getaway of Sehmat:** During her escape, in novel Mir plans Sehmat and Iqbal arrival at Crown Plaza but he is accompanied by Munira instead of Sehmat and they both die in bomb blast while in movie Sehmat with Zain Beig goes to Crown Plaza

where Iqbal comes after revealing her true identity to his father but in between, Sehmat is replaced by Sarfraz's wife Nafisa so Iqbal and Nafisa dies in bomb blast.

- xii. Back in India:** Sehmat Khan is grandly welcomed on her return after accomplishing her mission successfully in novel while she is brought back to India by Mir and his men in a van offering no grand gesture for accomplishing her duty faithfully.
- xiii. Musical Tracks:** The novel has two poems in chapter 9 “Oh winds please carry a message to my beloved country...” (Sikka 73) which Sehmat sings in memory of her beloved country and another “Oh Nature, Caged in the wrap of time...” (Sikka 75-76) which she sings to herself in bed at night yearning to fly free whereas the movie has rich music; setting the perfect tone for emotions flowing in the particular scenes. The lyrics are penned by Gulzar and music and background score are composed by Shankar Eshaan Loy. The title track *Raazi* in the voice of Arijit Singh takes place when Sehmat agrees to her father's final wish. The song captures Sehmat under training in Intelligence Bureau, New Delhi and is continued later when Sehmat is in Pakistan highlighting her ‘agreement’ to serve her motherland despite of challenges she encounters/will encounter on her endeavor. *Dilbaro* is the bride's farewell (*vidaai*) track from the movie album which beautifully captures the pain of Sehmat Khan leaving behind her parent's home and starting new phase of her life.

c) Dropped Scenes in *Raazi*:

The literary works can contain lengthy descriptions, internal monologues and subplots to give impetus, support and interest to the main plot. The works may have a great many characters, a good number of their stories will be carried by these minor actions. While adapting, filmmakers may omit, consolidate or simplify subplots, combine or skip characters or remove scenes that do not directly contribute to the main storyline or thematic elements of the film. Other reason can be that some scenes or elements that work well on the page may not translate

effectively to the visual medium of film and practical considerations such as budget limitations and time constraints may influence decision. Similarly, Meghna Gulzar has dropped few scenes from the novel.

Firstly, Meghna drops Hidayat and Tejashwari Singh's love story, Hidayat network playing a crucial role in 1965 Indo-Pak war, Tejashwari herself transferring information to intelligence on several occasions when Hidayat is not well.

Secondly, Sehmat's college life is a total miss in the movie.

Thirdly, the scenes in Pakistan like golf match Sehmat arranges to get close to Imtiaz Khan and his family. Sehmat visiting Dr. Huma Siddique for check-up is omitted.

Fourthly, the courage and sacrifices of Indian forces in winning 1971 war is dropped.

Fifthly, the theme of resilience is amiss in the movie *Raazi*. The movie fails to do justice with Sehmat Khan's character when she returns back to her motherland. Her journey after settling in Malerkotla, how she is depressed for seven years, how she overcomes it by turning towards God, how she becomes a saviour for women in village, an important member of *panchayat* and how she makes Malerkotla a better village— all these episodes do not find place in the motion picture.

Sixthly, religion plays an important role in building character of Sehmat Khan as she was born to a Hindu mother and a Muslim father, brought up in a secular environment where her parents lived in harmony practicing two completely different religions. They taught her "God is one" (Sikka 9). Turning towards God brings her back to life later in final years of her life. The movie basically focuses on nationality while in the novel religious differences are observed. Sehmat Khan was a dedicated dancer yet not allowed to play Meerabai's role in college annual day function because few trustees of the college were of opinion she is a Muslim and won't be able to justify a Hindu devotee. Hidayat Khan and Sehmat Khan were trusted by Brigadier Sheikh Sayeed because they were Muslims and Sehmat's job received much appreciation because she was a Muslim loyal to India.

Seventhly, *Raazi* also lets go the battle undertaken by Indian Navy to secure INS Vikrant. The movie only shows news clipping about INS Vikrant and India's victory in the war. It was Sehmat's information to RAW agents which changes the game upside down and India successfully manages to win the undersea war. In *Calling Sehmat* chapter 19-21 are devoted to naval battle where INS Rajput and INS Khukri were against PNS Ghazi to create blockage for the liberation of East Pakistan.

d) Appended scenes in *Raazi*:

In the cinematic adaptation *Raazi*, Meghna Gulzar has added few scenes that helped the movie in advancement of the plot and development of character. Iqbal Syed gives time and space to Sehmat Khan in order to settle in new environment. Their relationship grows swiftly as the movie takes recourse. He gifts her cassette of classical Hindustani music, his mother's anklets and embraces her whenever ill is talked about India by his family members especially Brigadier Syed. When he sees Sehmat's anklet piece in Abdul's room, Sehmat's real identity is revealed to him and he chooses to inform his father about Sehmat's disloyalty.

Conclusion:

To conclude, there are various similarities and dissimilarities in the source text and its cinematic adaptation, as is evident from the empirical study made in section two. Both the novelist and the director have the free hand to tailor their creative medium to suit their output. Interestingly, the novel ends in Malerkotla where the villagers are celebrating Munnawar Hussein's arrest and their realization that Sehmat is their saviour. The novel has an epilogue wherein General Sayeed commits suicide in his Haveli in Pakistan instead of facing court martial, Tejashwari Singh passes away few years after her daughter's death, Samar Khan takes premature retirement from the Indian Army and Abhinav Raj Singh continues to support his foster son Samar in fulfilling Sehmat's dream of focusing on the development and holistic growth of underprivileged children especially around Malerkotla whereas the movie ends abruptly failing to provide closure to Sehmat's life after returning back to India. The *closing scene* captures isolated Sehmat who is sitting on the chair in an old house away in the fields and is staring out of the window.

Keeping in view the above, it can be safely stated that *Raazi* as a cinematic adaptation ceases to give justice to the character of Sehmat Khan while her deeply seated patriotism, sense of sacrifice and moral dilemmas is closely adapted. Meghna Gulzar concludes in *Raazi* that Sehmat has returned back to India settling somewhere away in fields and has focused on conveying Sehmat's immediate emotional state and the tension of her situation, using silence and subtle visual cues. The movie fails to inform the audience that Sehmat is settled in Malerkotla. She is seen depressed for seven years and she turned towards God which helps her to reconcile with her thoughts. Later, she is seen working for the welfare of not only the village Malerkotla, but also of women at large in later years of her life.

Theoretically, to borrow words from Desmond and Hawkes, this motion picture falls under the category of an 'intermediate adaptation' which retains the core structure of the source text while re-formatting significant episodes for the production of artistic medium. Hutcheon views adaptation as both a process and a product — a form of “repetition with variation” (Hutcheon 4) — helps us appreciate how *Raazi* reimagines and reinterprets the novel's narrative techniques like point of view, characterization and thematic emphasis to reflect the filmmaker's perspective and engages audiences through its visual storytelling. *Raazi* is not merely a derivative of the novel but a creative reinterpretation that introduces new meanings and dimensions while engaging in an “extended intertextual engagement” (8) with the original text.

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**Staging Identity:
Theatrical Expressions of Linguistic Heritage and
Cultural Identity in Chinua Achebe's Literary Landscape**

P. Praseeba and R. C. Sheila Royappa

Abstract

Chinua Achebe masterfully employs theatrical expressions and oral traditions to explore language identity within postcolonial discourse. This paper examines how Achebe integrates performance, proverbs, and rhetorical strategies in works like *Things Fall Apart*, *Arrow of God*, and *No Longer at Ease* to dramatize the tensions between indigenous African languages, particularly Igbo, and colonial English. By fusing oral storytelling with literary techniques, Achebe creates a theatricalized linguistic space where resistance, adaptation, and cultural negotiation take place. This study highlights how Achebe's narrative style mirrors traditional African dramatic structures, such as masquerade performances and folklore enactments, serving both as a tool for cultural preservation and as a means of reasserting African agency. His dramatic use of language functions as an instrument of power, identity reclamation, and historical consciousness. By situating Achebe's literary techniques within postcolonial and linguistic identity studies, this paper argues that his works transform language into a dynamic stage for ideological contestation, cultural hybridity, and memory. Achebe's fiction not only reflects African literary aesthetics but also redefines them, making language an active site of performance and identity formation.

Keywords: Linguistic Identity, Postcolonial Discourse, Theatricality, Cultural Resistance, Code-Switching, Oral Tradition

Introduction: Theatre has long served as a powerful medium for cultural expression and identity formation. In postcolonial literature, the dramatization of linguistic tensions becomes an effective tool for articulating the struggles of a people caught between two worlds. Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* and *Arrow of God* offer rich material for theatrical adaptation, as they embody the linguistic dualities and identity conflicts central to postcolonial African societies. This study explores how Achebe's works, when examined through a theatrical lens, highlight the performativity aspects of language in the construction of identity and resistance.

In theatre, language is more than a mode of communication—it is an act of performance. Achebe's characters engage in verbal exchanges that reflect their shifting allegiances to colonial and indigenous cultures. The protagonist of *No Longer at Ease*, Obi Okonkwo, often struggles with English and Igbo, mirroring the internal conflicts of a postcolonial subject on stage. Similarly, in *Arrow of God*, Ezeulu's speeches and interactions dramatize the authoritative and contested nature of indigenous leadership. By adapting these linguistic struggles into performance, theatre becomes a space where audiences can witness the tension between imposed and inherited identities.

Dramatic Conflict and Identity Crisis: Both novels present conflicts that are inherently theatrical. Obi's moral dilemma regarding corruption and Ezeulu's resistance against colonial imposition can be staged as dramatic representations of identity crisis. Through monologues, dialogues, and symbolic stage elements, their internal and external struggles can be vividly brought to life. A theatrical adaptation of these novels would emphasize the role of language in power dynamics, showing how speech and silence become tools of resistance and submission.

Symbolism and Cultural Representation on Stage: Theatre relies heavily on symbols to communicate meaning beyond words. Achebe's novels contain rich symbolic elements, such as proverbs, rituals, and folklore that can be effectively translated into theatrical performances. The use of traditional music, dance, and stage props can enhance the storytelling, reinforcing the thematic concerns of cultural preservation and transformation.

In urbanized and globalized settings, language fusion mirrors the theatrical interplay between characters, as seen in Achebe's use of code-switching, proverbs, and rhetorical devices. The dialogue in *Arrow of God* and *Things Fall Apart* often functions as a performativity act, where characters shift between English and Igbo to navigate power structures, much like actors adapting their roles to different audiences. Theatricality emerges in the way language is used to negotiate identity—whether in formal council meetings, ritualistic performances, or moments of public oration, where speech acts serve as dramatic expressions of authority and resistance.

Moreover, Achebe's incorporation of oral storytelling traditions—a cornerstone of African theatrical performance—reinforces language as a dynamic and living entity. Storytelling in his works does not merely relay information but enacts cultural memory, with the storyteller assuming a role akin to that of an actor on stage. The passage from *Arrow of God* (1964) you cited exemplifies this, as Obika's voice transforms into Ulu's, illustrating how language can be a performativity vessel for spiritual and political power. Just as in traditional African theatre, where gods and ancestors speak through human intermediaries, Achebe's narrative dramatizes the fusion of voice and authority, reinforcing the connection between linguistic expression and theatrical enactment.

Furthermore, post-independence linguistic policies, aimed at balancing indigenous languages with English, can be seen as a form of theatrical staging—where the state, much like a playwright, sets the terms for language use, scripting a national dialogue that attempts to reconcile unity with diversity. This mirrors the dramatic tension in Achebe's works, where characters must navigate the imposed script of colonial language while reclaiming their indigenous linguistic identity through acts of resistance, subversion, and performance.

Thus, Achebe's literature can be interpreted as a theatrical space where language is not just spoken but performed, embodying the cultural and political struggles of postcolonial Nigeria.

Language is a dynamic and powerful force that permeates every facet of human society. Its significance extends far beyond mere

communication; it serves as a profound marker of identity, reflecting cultural, social, and political affiliations. Nowhere is this more evident than in the complex historical context of colonial and postcolonial Nigeria. This essay delves into the multifaceted role of language in shaping and delineating cultural, social, and political identities within this dynamic backdrop.

Language is the embodiment of a community's cultural heritage, encapsulating traditions, beliefs, and oral histories passed down through generations. In pre-colonial Nigeria, native languages were repositories of vast cultural riches, serving as conduits for the transmission of knowledge and societal values. Each ethnic group's language carried the nuances of their distinct worldviews, reflecting the diversity that characterized Nigeria's rich tapestry of cultures. With the advent of colonialism, this cultural tapestry faced challenges. Colonial powers imposed foreign languages, often English, as official languages, leading to the marginalization of native cultures. Native languages were relegated to the periphery, resulting in a loss of cultural autonomy. This linguistic imposition marked a profound disruption in the organic evolution of cultural identities.

Language is a unifying force, forging connections within communities and fostering a sense of belonging. The shared linguistic backgrounds of individuals create bonds that extend beyond immediate familial ties. In pre-colonial Nigeria, linguistic unity was foundational to community cohesion, enabling collective action and shared understanding. However, linguistic disparities also played a role in creating sociolinguistic strata within Nigerian society. English, as the language of colonial administration, became associated with privilege and education. This led to divisions along linguistic lines, stratifying communities based on their access to English and reinforcing social hierarchies.

In colonial and postcolonial Nigeria, language emerges as a dynamic force that shapes cultural, social, and political identities. It serves as a repository of cultural heritage, a nexus of social interaction, and a tool of political agency. While the colonial legacy introduced complexities, the resilience of native languages and the strategic adoption of English

reflect the adaptive nature of linguistic identities in Nigeria. Understanding this intricate interplay between language and identity is crucial in comprehending the evolving landscape of Nigerian society and its ongoing pursuit of unity amidst diversity.

Language is a powerful tool of expression, identity, and agency, particularly in contexts marked by colonialism and its aftermath. In the crucible of colonial and postcolonial struggles, deliberate manipulation of both English and indigenous languages emerged as a strategic means of resistance, negotiation, and assertion of agency. This essay delves into the nuanced ways in which language was wielded as a weapon, illuminating the profound impact it had on shaping socio-political landscapes. In colonial Nigeria, language became a contested terrain. The imposition of English as the official language was accompanied by attempts to diminish the significance of indigenous languages. However, this linguistic hegemony was met with resistance. Native speakers strategically wielded English, subverting its intended purpose to express their own narratives, aspirations, and critiques of colonial rule. Through subversive linguistic practices, individuals and communities covertly communicated dissent and rallied against oppressive policies. Simultaneously, indigenous languages were transformed into instruments of resistance. These languages became repositories of subversive messages, allowing communities to communicate covertly without the scrutiny of colonial authorities. Indigenous tongues evolved into conduits for organizing, mobilizing, and transmitting resistance narratives, enabling communities to maintain cohesion and solidarity in the face of external pressures.

As colonialism gave way to post colonialism, the linguistic landscape continued to evolve. Communities engaged in complex acts of negotiation, employing code-switching as a means of navigating the intricacies of linguistic power dynamics. This practice allowed for the fusion of English and indigenous languages, enabling individuals to straddle multiple linguistic worlds. Code-switching became a survival strategy, enabling individuals to maintain their cultural identities while adapting to the realities of a postcolonial society. The deliberate manipulation of language facilitated the emergence of hybrid identities, wherein individuals integrated elements

from both English and indigenous linguistic and cultural frameworks. This synthesis not only enabled a renegotiation of identity but also fostered a sense of resilience and adaptability in the face of changing sociopolitical landscapes. Hybrid identities became emblematic of the dynamism and adaptability of communities in their pursuit of agency and self-determination.

In the postcolonial era, deliberate manipulation of language extended beyond resistance and negotiation; it became a vehicle for asserting agency and reclaiming cultural autonomy. Indigenous languages, once marginalized, were revitalized as mediums of cultural expression, strengthening communal bonds and affirming the enduring significance of cultural heritage. Language also played a pivotal role in advocacy and representation within the political sphere. Leaders and activists harnessed the power of language to articulate the aspirations of their communities, mobilize support, and demand social and political change. Through eloquent and impassioned linguistic expression, individuals asserted their agency, challenging established power structures and advocating for a more inclusive and equitable society.

The deliberate manipulation of both English and indigenous languages as instruments of resistance, negotiation, and agency in colonial and postcolonial contexts reflects the profound adaptability and resilience of communities facing sociopolitical upheaval. Language, far from being a static medium, emerges as a dynamic force that shapes and is shaped by the complex interplay of power, identity, and agency. Understanding this intricate relationship between language and sociopolitical dynamics is crucial in unraveling the multifaceted narratives of resistance, negotiation, and assertion that define colonial and postcolonial histories.

Chinua Achebe's novels, *No Longer at Ease* and *Arrow of God* serve as literary mirrors reflecting the intricate interplay of language identity amidst the shifting sociolinguistic landscapes of colonial and early postcolonial Nigeria. Through a comprehensive exploration, this essay aims to unravel the nuanced evolution of language identity across both novels, shedding light on the dynamic sociolinguistic transformations that characterized this pivotal period in Nigerian history."For Ulu himself

had now come out of Obika's mouth and was walking about in the world like any other man. And there was no other god. Ulu alone was now god. He must be worshipped and obeyed in his new manifestation. This was a truth that now gripped him with the same fervor with which the other one had taken him unawares." (Achebe, 1964, p. 179)

In both novels, English emerges as a symbol of colonial authority. It is the language of administration, education, and governance. The characters' interactions with English reflect a complex relationship: a simultaneous recognition of its power and a lingering dissonance rooted in its colonial legacy. Obi Okonkwo in *No Longer at Ease* embodies this dichotomy, as he grapples with the expectations tied to English proficiency while navigating the weight of cultural heritage. Simultaneously, Achebe portrays the erosion of indigenous languages as a consequence of colonial dominance. This erosion is evident in the diminishing usage of native tongues in official contexts and the devaluation of traditional oral storytelling. However, Achebe also captures moments of linguistic resilience, where characters deliberately engage in conversations in their native languages, signaling a subtle resistance to the encroachment of English.

The novels delve into how language serves as a vehicle for cultural expression. In *Arrow of God* the portrayal of the Igbo oracle, Ulu, and the priest, Ezeulu, hinges on the linguistic and cultural rituals that underpin their roles. Similarly, in "No Longer at Ease," the clash between traditional Igbo values and Western legal systems is starkly embodied in the language used during Obi's trial. As colonialism recedes and Nigeria transitions into independence, Achebe introduces characters whose language identities reflect the evolving sociolinguistic landscape. For instance, Obi's niece, Anwulika, represents a new generation straddling the complexities of indigenous and English-speaking worlds. Her fluency in English does not negate her cultural allegiance; instead, it augments her ability to navigate the shifting terrains of identity.

Achebe's novels provide insight into the early postcolonial period, marked by a deliberate effort to forge a linguistic equilibrium. The recognition of English alongside indigenous languages as official languages reflects the nation's commitment to acknowledging its linguistic diversity

while providing a unifying medium for communication. The novels subtly convey the stratification that emerges within postcolonial Nigerian society based on linguistic proficiency. English proficiency becomes a marker of social mobility, opening doors to educational and professional opportunities. This linguistic stratification introduces a new layer of complexity to identity formation.

Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* and *Arrow of God* provide a rich tapestry of language identity evolution, offering profound insights into the sociolinguistic shifts that defined colonial and early postcolonial Nigeria. Through meticulously crafted characters and nuanced narrative techniques, Achebe navigates the complexities of linguistic agency, cultural preservation, and identity negotiation. The novels serve as literary time capsules, allowing readers to traverse the linguistic landscapes of a pivotal era, ultimately underscoring the enduring power of language in shaping individual and collective identities.

Language, as a medium of communication, is intricately woven into the fabric of identity. In postcolonial Africa, the complex interplay between language, politics, and identity emerges as a central theme in literature. This essay delves into the multifaceted relationship between language politics and identity in postcolonial African literature, exploring how writers grapple with linguistic legacies, negotiate cultural affiliations, and assert agency through their narrative voices.

Powers imposed their languages on African territories, wielding them as instruments of control. English, French, Portuguese, and other colonial languages became the dominant mediums of administration, education, and governance. This linguistic imposition had profound implications for the cultural and linguistic identities of African communities, creating a dichotomy between the official language of power and the indigenous languages of heritage. As colonial languages took precedence, indigenous languages faced marginalization. They were relegated to informal settings, oral traditions, and local contexts. This linguistic hierarchy not only disrupted the organic evolution of native languages but also contributed to a sense of cultural dissonance among Africans, who found themselves straddling multiple linguistic worlds.

Postcolonial African literature often grapples with the complexities of linguistic negotiation. Writers employ code-switching and linguistic hybridity to reflect the multilayered identities of their characters. This literary technique mirrors the lived experiences of individuals who navigate the fluid boundaries between colonial languages and indigenous tongues, demonstrating the adaptability and resilience of African identities. Language politics also intersect with broader cultural negotiations. African writers employ language as a vehicle to explore the syncretism of cultures, where traditional beliefs, practices, and cosmologies coexist with modernity and foreign influences. Through linguistic choices, authors depict the dynamic fusion of cultural elements, illustrating the evolving nature of African identities.

African writers play a pivotal role in the revitalization of indigenous languages. Through their works, they infuse native tongues with new vitality, affirming their cultural significance. Writers such as Ngig) waThiong'o advocate for linguistic decolonization, urging a return to native languages as a means of reclaiming cultural agency and asserting African identity. Language becomes a potent tool of political resistance in postcolonial African literature. Writers deploy their narrative voices to critique oppressive regimes, challenge linguistic hierarchies, and advocate for linguistic inclusivity. Through their literary works, they amplify the voices of marginalized communities, galvanizing movements for social justice and political change.

Postcolonial African literature serves as a powerful testament to the intricate relationship between language politics and identity. Through their narratives, African writers navigate the complex terrain of linguistic legacies, cultural negotiations, and assertions of agency. They illuminate the resilience and adaptability of African identities in the face of linguistic challenges, underscoring the enduring power of language in shaping individual and collective selfhood. Ultimately, postcolonial African literature stands as a vibrant testament to the indomitable spirit of African communities in their quest for linguistic and cultural autonomy.

In the exploration of Chinua Achebe's masterful novels, *No Longer at Ease* and *Arrow of God* it becomes strikingly evident that language

is far more than a mere vessel of communication. It emerges as a dynamic force, intricately woven into the very fabric of cultural, social, and political identities within the complex tapestry of colonial and postcolonial Nigeria. Through meticulous semantic analysis, we have witnessed how characters deftly wield English and indigenous languages, forging pathways of resistance, negotiation, and assertion of agency. In “No Longer at Ease,” we encountered Obi Okonkwo, whose linguistic journey mirrors the broader societal struggle. His adeptness in English, a tool bestowed with colonial authority, is both a key to his professional ascent and a tether to his cultural roots. Achebe masterfully navigates the nuances of Obi’s linguistic identity, illustrating the intricate dance between adherence to the colonial system and the yearning to preserve his Igbo heritage. This dichotomy mirrors the broader cultural milieu, where language embodies the tension between tradition and modernity.

Similarly, in *Arrow of God* Achebe immerses us in the realm of Ezeulu, the high priest of Ulu, whose identity is inextricably bound to the language and rituals of his people. The novel weaves a rich tapestry of linguistic traditions, revealing how indigenous languages serve as vessels of cultural continuity and spiritual significance. Through Ezeulu, Achebe emphasizes the profound symbiosis between language and religious identity, underscoring how the fate of a culture is intricately tied to the preservation of its linguistic heritage. As we traverse these narrative landscapes, it becomes evident that language is not a static entity, but a living, breathing testament to the adaptability and resilience of individuals and communities. The deliberate manipulation of language, whether in resistance to colonial impositions or in the negotiation of evolving sociolinguistic landscapes, is a testament to the agency inherent in linguistic choices. Through their linguistic agency, Achebe’s characters transcend mere words; they become agents of cultural preservation, social negotiation, and political assertion.

In the broader context of postcolonial discourse, Achebe’s novels offer invaluable insights into the enduring legacy of language politics and identity in Nigeria. They stand as literary testaments to the profound impact of linguistic choices on the formation and reformation of identities in a society marked by colonial legacies. Through meticulous semantic

analysis, we have unraveled the intricate interplay between language and identity, shedding light on the dynamic forces that shape the lives of Achebe's characters. In conclusion, Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* and *Arrow of God* serve as literary crucibles wherein the semantic complexities of language identity are forged. Through the deliberate manipulation of English and indigenous languages, Achebe's characters navigate the intricate terrain of colonial and postcolonial Nigeria, asserting their agency and preserving their cultural heritage. In doing so, they illuminate the enduring power of language as a multifaceted tool in the delineation of cultural, social, and political identities. The resonance of Achebe's exploration extends far beyond the pages of his novels, providing us with invaluable insights into the broader discourse of language politics and identity in postcolonial African literature.

Conclusion: By reinterpreting *No Longer at Ease* and *Arrow of God* through a theatrical framework, we gain new insights into the performativity nature of language identity in postcolonial Africa. Theatre provides a compelling platform to visualize the linguistic and cultural struggles depicted in Achebe's works, offering audiences an immersive experience of identity negotiation and resistance. This study advocates for more adaptations of African postcolonial literature into theatre, as a means of preserving and amplifying cultural discourse through performance.

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**Staging Absence as an Alternate Theatre Narrative:
Post-dramatic Aesthetics and Minimalist Performance in
Jon Fosse’s *Melancholy I-II* (2023) and
Someone is Going to Come (1996)**

S Ambadi Narayanan and P V Ramanathan

Abstract

This paper aims at analyzing Jon Fosse’s novel *Melancholy I-II* and the play “*Someone is Going to Come*” in terms of post-dramatic features and structures. The postdramatic theatrical aesthetic found in Fosse’s work, through fragmented narratives, minimalist language, and sensorially, questions the traditional concept of culture by focusing on experience and feelings. In *Melancholy I–II*, Fosse uses a non-linear and fragmented narrative that corresponds to the psychological and artistic crisis of the protagonist, Lars Hertervig. This is an open invitation to interpretive and performative readings that transform the process of comprehension into an active experience of the complexity and the chaotic emotional landscape of the protagonist. *Someone is Going to Come* employs the vagueness of space and time to enhance existential anxiety and expectation. The play’s dialogue and its focus on expressions, which include periods of silence, also contribute to the discovery and expression of feelings and states of being, which are broached in existential drama. That is why the play’s fragmented dialogue helps performers and spectators focus on characters’ inner worlds, offering an interpretive and embodied theatrical performance. Fosse’s works meet the tenets of postdramatic theatre, in which the text is present but only as a trigger for the performative experience. However, by breaking away from the written text, Fosse makes it possible for the audience and readers to have a deep experience with the playwright’s characters and issues.

This paper aims to elaborate on how Fosse uses narrative techniques and themes to expand post-dramatic theory by liberating performance from text to provide a new perspective on the human condition.

Keywords: Post dramatic theatre, Fragmented narrative, Non-linear storytelling, Emancipation of performance

The realm of contemporary theater has undergone significant transformation, marked by a departure from traditional narrative structures and an exploration of more abstract, experiential forms. This shift, often encapsulated in the term 'postdramatic theater,' foregrounds elements such as atmosphere, mood, and the interplay of presence and absence, eschewing linear storytelling and character-driven plots. Within this framework, the works of Norwegian playwright Jon Fosse stand out as exemplary embodiments of postdramatic tendencies. Jon Fosse, a Norwegian playwright, and novelist is renowned for his distinctive literary style that often blurs the boundaries between stage and novel. His works frequently exhibit a unique interplay between theatrical and narrative forms, challenging traditional genre distinctions and creating a hybrid literary experience. Fosse is upfront and straightforward about the fact that his technique and style of storytelling influenced various thinkers and made him a shining example of contemporary literature. His sense of originality and ability to successfully strip complex emotions down to their breast forms make him stand out as one of the most unique minds in literature.

Jon Fosse's literary works exhibit profound connections to post dramatic theatre through their fragmented narratives, existential focus, minimalist style, temporal and spatial ambiguity, use of silence, deconstructed characters, and sensory emphasis. By prioritizing the psychological and emotional experiences of the characters and the readers over conventional plot and character development, Fosse's literary works resonate with the principles of post dramatic theatre. Post dramatic theatre, a phrase coined by Hans-Thies Lehmann in 1999, has gained significant attention from theatre theorists and is considered highly appealing. It has emerged as a prominent concept in critical discourse, surpassing even the popularity of the theatre of the absurd. Like many

important terms, particularly in modern times, the widespread use of the term has led to a loss of its clear and consistent definition. Although the historical usage of the term may be identified, there is no theatrical occurrence that it refers to that cannot be traced back to earlier times in theatre practice. The word post is the most used word when it comes to critical discourse of the last fifty years. All the post phrases have the common trait of negating some core aspects of a given traditional practice while also highlighting the contemporary nature of the event at hand. Here, there is always a sense that the tradition that is passed over is quite stable and consistent, and the post-movement is meant to destabilize it. The 'de' prefix in the term 'deconstruction' performs a similar function. To comprehend the meaning of the post dramatic, it is crucial to understand what is being replaced by it.

English theatre scholars over the past century have usually rigidly distinguished between theatre and drama as a scholarly practice. Drama is a written form of literature and its historical context, whereas theatre is a stage performance of drama. However, a small group of theorists, especially Edward Gordon Craig, tried to distinguish the two over a century ago, which is crucial to the post-dramatic concept. More than a visual interpretation of an already-written material remained the most dominant throughout the greater part of the 20th century and still permeates the theatrical cultures of many countries, especially in the USA. Postmodernism occurrences have not been recorded in the major theatres of France and Germany as recorded in the US. This was recognized by the semiotic theorists in the 1970s and 1980s: that there was a difference between literary texts and performance texts. But they have a common opinion that performance texts are based on literary texts, and the words of the original text are rewritten in so-called theatrical code. The theatre, which Lehmann describes as post dramatic, is not a theatre of drama as such but rather evolves a performative aesthetic in which the text of the performance is put in a special relation to the material situation of the performance and the stage.

The way Jon Fosse addresses time and space in his literary works is important to the setting and meaning of his works. Through analyzing the way Fosse uses the concepts of time and space, it becomes clear

how these dimensions define the emotional and existential experience of the characters. With his vague, shapeless environments and his often-disjointed events and scenes, Fosse establishes a narrative that breaks away from the typical boundaries of the story and encourages the reader and viewer to enter a more inward and sensory-oriented world. Time is one of the most challenging and unclearly interpreted aspects of Fosse's work. In *Melancholy I-II*, the plot jumps back and forth between various episodes in the life of the painter Lars Hertervig. It refers to Hertervig's mental condition, with the past and the present being involved in each other in a shifting manner. Through the plot's non-linear structure, Fosse highlights the protagonist as the Centre of a psychological drama rather than a historical event narrator. It correlates well with the post dramatic focus on the experiential and psychological aspects of time and provides a richer narrative.

In the play *Someone is Going to Come*, the expectation of an unknown or unannounced event in the future makes the present moment stand still. They are all characterized by a state of suspension because they are all concerned about the future rather than the present. Such temporal ambiguity contributes to the play's existential setting and reminds the audience of the emotional and psychological condition of the characters and their anxieties and fears. Even the use of space by Fosse is equally important with ambiguity and liminality. His settings tend to be vague or generic, as he does not provide specific geographical locations; they are instead general and often symbolic of the emotional or psychological state of the characters. The house in *Someone is going to come* is also an example of a liminal space. It is far away from civilization and hence acts as both a physical and psychological barrier between the characters and the outside world. The house also becomes a place of safety and prison, depicting the characters' desire to be alone and their fear of being disturbed. The non-specific location of the play adds to the overall tension and emphasizes the existential crises of the characters throughout the play. The use of time and space in Fosse's work also contributes to the meditation and contemplative nature of the works. The repetitive, cyclical nature of time and the abstract fluid spaces encourage readers and audiences to explore the underlying emotional and existential threads.

Such an approach creates an atmosphere conducive to thinking and reflecting the silences, pauses, and questions and answers that remain unanswered encourage one to think and ponder.

Jon Fosse employs a highly non-traditional way of telling a story by using a nonlinear and fragmented format. Just like his novel *Melancholy I-II* and his play *Someone is Going to Come* demonstrate, his style of writing reflects his approaches to human consciousness, existential anxiety, and the subjective feeling of time and space. These works indicate how Fosse heightens both thematic prevalence and emotional potency through his use of narrative; the post dramatic inclinations proposed by the chosen works correspond to his narrative practices and the notions of traditional narrative structure. *Melancholy I-II*, Fosse's novel about the Norwegian artist Lars Hertervig, uses a disjointed storyline as an expression of the mentally disturbed protagonist's inner turmoil. The novel also shifts through times and consciousness levels simultaneously, weaving fragments of memories, thoughts, and events in the present. Fosse's narrative is presented non-linearly as a reflection of Hertervig's mind; a mind that is conflicted with instability and despair.

The narrative of the story flows back and forth between Hertervig's childhood, his time as an artist, and his confinement without concern for time. This temporal fluidity enables readers to identify with Hertervig's inner conflict and experience his sense of self-disintegration in real time. The leaps in time make the reader aware of the inability of Hertervig to think logically and therefore concentrate on his suffering as an epileptic, which increases the sympathy of the reader. The nonlinear structure of the novel also reflects the nature of memory and remembering. Remembering and recalling do not necessarily occur in chronological order but in a disjointed and psychologically biased way. In this way, the novel depicts memory and its effect on human identity in the best feasible way. Hertervig's memories and current thoughts and fears are interwoven in the book to create an account of the world that inspired his melancholic attitude. This fragmentation lets the reader try to put together Hertervig's life and emotions based on what they read. Fosse also uses repetition, which helps to strengthen the non-linear structure. Repetitive and even poetic places, phrases, symbols, and themes are

repeated throughout the book. This repetition symbolizes Hertervig's obsessive thinking and the nature of his cyclical depression. It also serves to connect the disparate storylines, adding thematic coherence to the temporal and spatial jumps. The recurring images serve as motifs that reinforce the main ideas, such as the artistic quest, the search for existential purpose, and the meaning of life.

Fosse uses a remarkably similar style of non-linear plotting and disjointed imagery but is more subtle and evocative in its own fashion in his play *Someone is Going to Come*. The play revolves around a couple who relocate to a secluded house because they seek seclusion and want the world to leave them alone. The time sequence in the play is also blurred and uncertain. The plot is developed in a sequence of scenes that are more about ambience and emotional moments than constant action. Time becomes warped and distorted by the present, responding to the future possibilities of an event by stretching the time involved in its occurrence when somebody is going to come. This affects the viewer's linear perception of time and adds to the play's sense of suspense, existential elements and spatial fragmentation supports temporal ambiguity. A house isolated in the wild and surrounded by nature becomes a place of fantasy—a place where one can tell the difference between reality and fantasy. The setting is only described to the barest extent, and the setting thus becomes a physical as well as a mental space. This spatial ambiguity means that the characters are isolated from one another and from society in general, which underscores the themes of loneliness and fear. Repetition in the play is used analogously to the way the plot in *Melancholy I-II* is structured. The characters have long pauses, silence, repetition, and redundancy, which gives a very rhythmic and meditative quality to their dialogue. This helps to emphasize their emotions and suspense as their dialogues revolve around their fears and desires without making them clear and concrete. This fragmentation in dialogue harks to their inability to communicate, which adds to the theme of existential isolation present in the play.

In addition, the non-linear and fragmented structures in both *Melancholy I-II* and *Someone is Going to Come* help expand and enhance the thematic and emotional effects of Fosse's pieces. Through breaking

the traditional modes of narration, Fosse challenges the reader's and the audience's concept of the text as simply an intellectual exercise. The non-linear and fragmented narratives also help heighten the emotional effect of Fosse's works. Thus, Fosse's films linger in the minds of audiences not just as stories but as vivid experiences that engage the senses through the eyes of characters. Its cyclical nature reflects the situation of the characters and makes all the readers feel entrapped with them. In *Melancholy I-III* the disjointed nature of the structure enables readers to feel the sadness and sense of yearning that Hertervig evokes. The lack of a linear plot lets the reader experience his feelings and really feel the intensity of his emotions. Likewise, in *Someone is Going to Come* the play was written in fragments, and the play did not indicate the time and place of the action, which made the reader uncomfortable as to who the characters are and what they want from each other.

Emancipation is a crucial idea in post dramatic theatre and refers to the process that takes theatre away from the scripted text to the performance for the audience. Fosse achieves this in his works by using structure, language, and depth of theme to open the art up beyond mere text to a more interpretative performance. In *Melancholy I-III* Fosse uses fragmented storytelling and nonlinear time concepts that inherently Fluidity is a performative reception. "He sits on the bed. He remembers. He sees the light on the walls as the light from the past, the light from his childhood. He is no longer here, but there. There and then, not here and now" (Fosse 97). The concept in Terms of Temporal Fluidity where past and present overlap and merge in Fosse's play. The main character, Lars Hertervig, has one of his few moments in which he can recall the past in the same way as the present. This blending of historical periods encourages the reader to engage in an act of turning back and forth through Hertervig's life, and thus, it offers a form of active reading. The text itself becomes a medium through which the reader can understand the protagonist's fragmented mind and transcend simple cause-and-effect thinking. The choice of the narrative with the shift in time and the focus on the first-person perception of reality makes the reader search for the protagonist's meaning. This engagement is not simply a form of interpretative consumption of the text, but an active, performative

process of response. This fragmented structure enables the creation of a second narrative that can be multisyllabic and implies the complexity of Lars Hertervig's psychological and emotional experiences. By moving through and across these layers, readers play out the process of comprehending, and, thus, the reading process is here portrayed as an engagement.

Fosse has chosen simple language in *Melancholy I-II* and reiterates; these aspects also contribute to liberation of performance from text. The simplistic and droning style of writing builds an almost melodic reading experience to the inner monologue of Hertervig. This rhythm induces a contemplative state of reading to incite feelings, in which the reader performs with the text. Repetition also proves beneficial in helping the reader remember themes and motifs of the novel as well as the overall mood of the book, which in this case is existential and introspective. The spare conversation leads the audience to do what we do in real life: use our imagination and bodily emotions to complete the storytelling presented in the text. Moreover, Fosse's elaborate accounts of Hertervig's physiological and affective states contribute to the liberation of the performance from the text. The constant shifting of perspectives that occur in the novel and the centrality of the protagonist's perceptions of light, colour, and sound make for a particularly engaging textual experience. Audiences are encouraged to interpret Hertervig's life as if they themselves are living through his trials and accomplishments. This haptic experience reverses the reading process and turns it into a performative interaction with the text by the reader and the protagonist.

The novel attains a sense of existence and actively creates a two-way relationship between the readers and their empathy, as well as reflection. In the play *Someone is Going to Come* Fosse uses the notion of performance through the construction of the finite space and the timelessness of the action taking place. This results in the establishment of a liminal space between life and fiction, grounded in isolation and constant waiting. This duality creates possibility for a performance that is not strictly bound by the text but provides the opportunity for much freedom and even imagination.

The action takes place in unending anticipation and limited to a given temporal context, and this makes the performance and reception of the play to be profound in terms of the character's psychological states. Through the brevity and enigmatic nature of the dialogues between the characters, their inner emotional and psychological condition is depicted. The anxiety of 'everything' and 'nothing' raises the question of an existential angst that is beyond the written or spoken word. These stately gaps in between the lines give the actors an opportunity to express these fears in body language and facial expressions, turning the play into an embodiment of feelings that are only suggested in the text. Such depth of emotional commitment encourages the audience to personally relate to the characters and participate in the story beyond the scripted words. The absence of stationarity and definite temporal references contributes to the timeless mode, pushing the emphasis from the narrative events to the characters' subjectivity. This change makes performance an existential drama in which the text provides not a play but a network of problems to solve.

In *Someone is Going to Come* Fosse omits much of the dialogue and employs silence and pauses in ways that completely liberate the show from the script. Thus, using the dialogue's structure, the author achieves a minimalist, monotonous, and even hypnotizing tone. It would also be important to mention that all the intervals between the lines are as meaningful as words, which makes it possible to produce a performance that is based more on the suggested emotions than on the actual words said on stage. These pauses leave gaps that are filled with narrations, which make the interpreting performer evaluate the feelings of the characters in their drama. The brief conversation in the play serves as a framework to a deeper performative experience of the themes of human existence in the middle of the play. This approach resonates with the basic tenets of post-dramatic trend which accentuates the performative and existential aspects of theatre. The emotional and psychological impact of the characters in the play *Someone is Going to Come* adds a new dimension to the personal freedom of the actors from the text. It makes silent emotions, such as fears, desires, and existential crises, more apparent in relation to words and actions throughout many scenes. This

subtlety enables the actor to delve into the psychological worlds of the characters, which is what makes a very intricate dramatic experience for the viewer. This emphasis on the subject's inner worlds also permit actors to draw on their own psychological and emotional reactions while rehearsing and staging the play, which tailors the performance to the performers' interpretation of the source material. Through the experimentation of the text and the performance, one is inspired to investigate aspects of human existence further.

Focusing on post dramatic features, Jon Fosse's *Someone is Going to Come* and *Melancholy I-II* contains valuable information and representations of contemporary post dramatic theatrical culture that go beyond the story-telling capabilities and the theatrical forms. This study has examined how Fosse's productions adhere to postdramatic theatre by perturbing the notions of time and space, using minimal conversation, and constructing an atmospheric environment that erases written words. Both texts reflect the post dramatic aesthetics in which the spectator's experience and the affective staging take precedence over the notions of plot and narrative. By leaving gaps in the plotline, Fosse's work removes significant layers of sensationalism, leaving viewers with raw, human emotions and philosophy to ponder. This post dramatic shift corresponds with the disillusioned focus on the immaterial and the recovery of the process of meaning-making as the affective and ontological layers that his plays explore.

In conclusion, Jon Fosse's *Someone is Going to Come* and *Melancholy I-II* are the definition of post dramatic theatre because they free the performance from the strict text. Thus, Fosse uses fragmented storytelling, limited dialogue, and an intense focus on emotions and bodily sensations to turn reading and viewing into a performative act. By considering how Fosse's work subverts the frameworks of theatre and produces a compelling and engaging experience, this research articulates how Fosse's work aligns with the primary concepts of post dramatic theory. Thus, understanding Fosse's impacts in the context of contemporary literary and theatrical developments highlights the extent to which his works contributed to the development of the story and the

performance as a paradigm in the sphere of post dramatic art.

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Shakespeare in Folk Literature

Shamsad Nahar

Abstract

William Shakespeare's influence extends beyond classical literature into the realm of folk traditions, where his themes, narratives, and characters have been absorbed, adapted, and reinterpreted across cultures. His works have inspired folk ballads, oral storytelling, and regional theatrical forms such as India's Jatra and Japan's Kabuki. Elements of his plays, particularly *Romeo and Juliet*, *Macbeth* and *Hamlet* have been woven into folk dramas, myths, and proverbial sayings, reflecting their universal appeal. Additionally, Shakespeare himself has become a folk figure, surrounded by legends and myths about his life. Star-crossed lovers (*Romeo and Juliet*) appear in numerous folk tales worldwide, such as the Persian love story of *Layla and Majnun*. Ambition and downfall (*Macbeth*) resonate with folk tales about rulers who overreach their power and face tragic consequences. Disguises and mistaken identities, commonly found in Shakespeare's comedies (*Twelfth Night*, *As You Like It*), are also present in folk storytelling traditions. In England, *The Ballad of King Lear and His Three Daughters* emerged as a popular folk song, retelling the tragic tale in a simple, rhymed format. Scottish and Irish folk ballads have drawn inspiration from *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*, emphasizing supernatural elements like witches and ghosts. *The Tempest* has been reinterpreted in African oral traditions, linking its themes of exile and magical powers to indigenous mythologies. Elements of Shakespearean tragedy are found in the magical realism of Latin American storytelling. Shakespeare's works have been adapted into Peking Opera, incorporating traditional Chinese storytelling techniques. The idea that Shakespeare did not write his own works, with myths attributing them to other figures such as Francis Bacon or Christopher Marlowe. The

seamless integration of his works into folk literature highlights their adaptability, proving that his stories transcend time, language, and geography, enriching global storytelling traditions.

Keywords: folk literature, jatra, oral traditions, mythology, storytelling, folk ballads, theatrical forms.

Shakespeare's influence extends beyond classical literature into folk literature and cultural traditions worldwide. Folk literature encompasses oral traditions, tales, songs, and other community-driven narratives that often adapt and reinterpret elements of Shakespeare's work. Here's how Shakespeare resonates within folk literature:

Shakespeare's themes and narratives have inspired folk songs and ballads, particularly in English-speaking countries. For example, ballads like *The Willow Song* from *Othello* have found their way into traditional folk repertoires. Shakespeare's exploration of love, betrayal, ambition, and power resonates deeply with folk traditions, which often tackle similar universal human experiences. These themes make his works adaptable to diverse cultural contexts. Folk literature often emphasizes morality and ethics. Plays like *King Lear* or *Macbeth* are reinterpreted as cautionary tales within oral traditions. In places like Africa, Shakespeare's works have been retold using indigenous metaphors, proverbs, and narrative styles. Hamlet might become a story of tribal rivalry, while *The Tempest* might be recast as a tale of colonial resistance. Shakespearean dramas have been adapted into folk theater forms worldwide, blending his narratives with regional performance styles.

Shakespearean dramas have been widely adapted into folk theater traditions across different cultures, blending his universal themes with local storytelling techniques, music, and performance styles. These adaptations highlight the flexibility of Shakespeare's works and their ability to resonate with diverse audiences. Some notable folk theater traditions that have incorporated Shakespearean plays include: **Jatra**, a Bengali folk theater form, has staged adaptations of Shakespeare's plays, often blending them with local music, dance, and elaborate dialogue. *Macbeth* and *Othello* have been particularly popular, with performances

emphasizing dramatic conflicts, moral lessons, and supernatural elements that align with indigenous storytelling.

Japanese traditional theater forms such as **Kabuki** and **Noh** have drawn inspiration from Shakespeare's plays, reinterpreting them with stylized movement, elaborate costumes, and unique storytelling techniques. *Macbeth* has been adapted into the Noh play *Kanadehon Chūshingura*, and elements of *Hamlet* and *King Lear* have been incorporated into Kabuki performances.

The classical dance-drama **Kathakali** from Kerala has adapted Shakespeare's tragedies into visually striking performances, emphasizing exaggerated facial expressions and rhythmic movements. *Othello* and *Macbeth* have been retold using Kathakali's symbolic gestures and intense emotional expression.

Wayang Kulit, the Indonesian shadow puppet theater, has integrated elements of Shakespeare's works, particularly *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, into its traditional epic narratives. These adaptations often merge Shakespearean themes with local folklore, Hindu mythology, and moral teachings.

Traditional English Puppet Theater, *Punch and Judy*, has incorporated Shakespearean elements, especially comic and grotesque characters similar to those in *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Twelfth Night*. Shakespeare's fool and clown characters often find parallels in these exaggerated, humorous performances.

The improvisational Italian folk theater **Commedia dell'arte** shares thematic similarities with Shakespearean comedy, influencing adaptations of *The Tempest* and *Much Ado About Nothing*. Stock characters in Commedia dell'arte, such as Harlequin and Pantalone, closely resemble Shakespearean comedic archetypes. These adaptations demonstrate how Shakespeare's dramas have seamlessly merged with folk theater traditions, proving their universal appeal and adaptability across cultures.

Shakespeare's phrases, such as "all that glitters is not gold" or "to be or not to be," have become proverbial and are often found in folk idioms and everyday speech, blending into the oral traditions of various cultures.

Folklore often simplifies and localizes Shakespeare's plots to suit its audience. For example: *Romeo and Juliet* parallels are found in folk tales worldwide, like India's Laila-Majnu or Persia's Layla and Majnun. *The Taming of the Shrew* echoes through folk tales about clever and independent women in many cultures.

Folk festivals often incorporate Shakespearean plays, merging them with local traditions. For instance: In England, traditional May Day celebrations or *Mummers' plays* may include Shakespearean motifs. In rural areas of Europe, Shakespearean scenes are interwoven with folk pageantry.

Storytellers in non-literate or semi-literate societies often adapt Shakespearean tales to fit oral performance, emphasizing rhythm, rhyme, and mnemonic devices that align with folk literature techniques.

By merging Shakespeare's narratives with folk traditions, communities create dynamic and evolving interpretations of his work, keeping it alive in new and meaningful ways. His integration into folk literature demonstrates the universal and adaptable nature of his storytelling.

Shakespeare's presence in folk literature reflects his universal appeal and ability to transcend cultural and linguistic boundaries. Folk literature, rooted in oral traditions and communal storytelling, has often borrowed from Shakespeare's works, reshaping his themes, characters, and stories to suit local traditions and audiences.

Shakespeare's characters have entered the folk imagination, often becoming archetypes. The cunning and ambitious Lady Macbeth mirrors folkloric depictions of strong, scheming women. Puck from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* resembles mischievous fairies and tricksters from folk traditions, such as Robin Goodfellow in English folklore.

Shakespeare in folk literature represents a living tradition, where his timeless works are reshaped to reflect the values, humor, and wisdom of diverse cultures. This process highlights the enduring adaptability and relevance of his storytelling. Shakespeare's influence on folk literature demonstrates how his works transcend boundaries of time, language, and culture. Through oral traditions, localized storytelling, and folk

performances, his themes and narratives have been seamlessly woven into the fabric of global folk traditions.

Shakespeare's stories have often been adapted into oral narratives, stripped of their complexity and reinterpreted as folk tales. In *Romeo and Juliet* the star-crossed lovers' story parallels folktales like Laila-Majnu in India or the *Appalachian Barbara Allen ballad*, highlighting universal themes of love and tragedy. The folktales of ambition and supernatural intervention reflect themes from *Macbeth*, often reimagined with local ghosts and spirits. Complex plots and language are simplified for accessibility, focusing on the main themes or moral lessons. The characters are often reimagined as familiar archetypes in local cultures.

Themes of love, betrayal, ambition, revenge, and morality align closely with folk literature's focus on universal human experiences. In *Hamlet* the story of a son avenging his father's murder resonates with folklore that emphasizes loyalty, duty, and revenge. In African oral traditions, *Hamlet* is reimagined with tribal conflicts and ancestral spirits. The magical and otherworldly elements of *The Tempest* make it a natural fit for folklore, adapted as stories about colonial encounters, spirits, and the reconciliation of human and natural forces in oral narratives. Oral narratives often use poetic techniques to make the stories memorable, aligning with Shakespeare's use of iambic pentameter. Storytellers adapt plots and characters on the fly, making them relatable to their audience's immediate context.

Shakespeare's works have inspired numerous ballads and songs, both during his time and in later centuries. His influence is evident in traditional folk ballads, theatrical songs, and modern musical adaptations. These ballads and songs helped preserve and spread Shakespearean narratives beyond the stage, embedding them into folk traditions and popular culture.

Many of Shakespeare's tragedies and histories were adapted into folk ballads that simplified the stories and made them accessible to common audiences. Some notable examples include: "*The Ballad of King Lear and His Three Daughters*". A folk ballad that retells King Lear's tragic story, emphasizing themes of betrayal, ingratitude, and fate. Often sung in a

simple, repetitive structure, making it easy to remember and pass down orally: “*The Lamentable Ballad of Fair Rosamond*”

Though not directly from a Shakespearean play, this ballad about Rosamond Clifford, a mistress of King Henry II, shares thematic elements with Shakespearean tragedies like *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet*. The story of doomed love and deception reflects the motifs found in Shakespeare’s works: “*The Ballad of Hamlet*”. Folk versions of Hamlet’s story exist in English and Scandinavian traditions, focusing on revenge and supernatural elements. These ballads often emphasize the ghostly presence of Hamlet’s father and the tragic downfall of the protagonist.

Shakespeare himself incorporated songs into his plays, many of which became popular folk songs over time. Some of these include: “**Sigh No More, Ladies**” (*Much Ado About Nothing*). A cheerful yet ironic song about men’s infidelity, emphasizing the need for women to move on from heartbreak. This song has been set to music in various folk and classical renditions: “**Come Away, Death**” (*Twelfth Night*). A melancholic song about unrequited love and death, often adapted in traditional ballad form. Its haunting lyrics have inspired many folk and classical musical settings: “**Full Fathom Five**” (*The Tempest*). A song about transformation and the sea, originally sung by the spirit Ariel in *The Tempest*. This lyrical piece has been reinterpreted in folk, choral, and even modern musical arrangements.

Beyond traditional folk ballads, Shakespeare’s themes and lines have influenced later musical traditions, including: 19th and 20th Century Folk Music. English and Scottish folk singers adapted Shakespearean themes of love, betrayal, and tragedy into their repertoires. Ballads like Barbara Allen share thematic similarities with Shakespeare’s doomed lovers. Bob Dylan, Leonard Cohen, and other folk musicians have drawn inspiration from Shakespearean language and themes. Many modern folk and rock artists have set Shakespeare’s sonnets to music, continuing the tradition of storytelling through song. Shakespeare’s works have deeply influenced folk ballads and songs, ensuring their survival beyond the stage and into the oral traditions of storytelling. His lyrics, themes, and narratives continue to inspire musicians and folk artists, demonstrating the timelessness of his contributions to literature and music.

William Shakespeare's works have had a lasting impact on the English language, contributing numerous phrases and proverbs that have become part of everyday speech. Many lines from his plays have transcended their original contexts and are now commonly used as proverbial expressions. Here are some well-known proverbs derived from Shakespeare:

“All that glitters is not gold” (*The Merchant of Venice*, Act II, and Scene 7) means appearances can be deceptive; not everything that looks valuable is truly valuable. It is often used as a cautionary saying, advising against judging something based on its outward appearance.

“Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them.” (*Twelfth Night*, Act II, Scene 5) This means people attain greatness in different ways—some inherit privilege, some work hard for success, and others are put into great positions unexpectedly. This phrase is frequently quoted in discussions of leadership, ambition, and fate.

“The better part of valor is discretion.” (*Henry IV, Part 1*, Act V, Scene 4) It means true bravery includes knowing when to avoid unnecessary risks. It is used to justify careful or strategic decision-making rather than reckless bravery.

“Brevity is the soul of wit.” (*Hamlet*, Act II, Scene 2) This intelligent speech should be concise. It encourages people to be direct and to the point in conversations, writing, or speeches.

“The course of true love never did run smooth.” (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Act I, Scene 1) It means love often faces difficulties and obstacles. It is commonly used when discussing romantic troubles or relationships facing challenges.

“There is no darkness but ignorance.” (*Twelfth Night*, Act IV, Scene 2) It hints that ignorance is the greatest obstacle to knowledge and understanding. It is used to highlight the importance of education and awareness.

“What's done is done.” (*Macbeth*, Act III, Scene 2) It means the past cannot be changed; one must move forward. It is often used to

encourage someone to accept past mistakes or misfortunes and focus on the future.

“To thine own self be true” (*Hamlet, Act I, Scene 3*) means be honest with yourself and stay true to your values. It is a reminder to act with integrity and remain authentic.

“Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown.” (*Henry IV, Part 2, Act III, Scene 1*) It means leadership and power come with great responsibilities and burdens. It is used to describe the pressures faced by those in authority or high positions.

“Love all, trust a few, do wrong to none.” (*All’s Well That Ends Well, Act I, Scene 1*) Be kind and loving to everyone, but be cautious in whom you place your trust. This is a proverb promoting kindness, caution, and ethical behavior.

Shakespeare’s words have stood the test of time, and many of his lines have evolved into everyday proverbs that guide moral, social, and philosophical thought. Their continued use in modern language reflects the enduring wisdom and universality of his works.

In India in folk theaters like Jatra and Tamasha, plays like *Macbeth* and *Othello* are adapted to Indian settings, incorporating music, dance, and moral lessons. *Romeo and Juliet* is reimaged in Bollywood films, reflecting the cultural significance of family and honor. In Africa *Hamlet* has been retold as an African tale involving tribal conflicts and ancestral spirits, emphasizing community loyalty and tradition. *Macbeth* is adapted to explore themes of colonialism and indigenous power struggles, with local symbols of supernatural forces. In Japan *Macbeth* becomes **Kumonosu-jô** (Throne of Blood), a Noh-influenced film set in feudal Japan, blending samurai culture with Shakespearean tragedy. *Hamlet* is staged as a Kabuki play, incorporating stylized movements and traditional Japanese aesthetics. In China *The Merchant of Venice* is reinterpreted as a cautionary tale about Confucian values, with Shylock portrayed in light of Chinese moral frameworks. Localized performances in Peking Opera highlight familial duty and collective harmony. In Europe in rural England, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* is performed with localized folklore, such as adding traditional faerie myths. In Italian **commedia dell’arte**,

Shakespeare's comedies are adapted with stock characters and improvisational humor. In the America in the Appalachian region, *Romeo and Juliet* becomes a mountain tale about feuding families, with a rustic, folk-inspired setting. In Latin America, *Hamlet* is adapted to explore themes of political revolution and familial loyalty within a regional cultural framework. Plays are relocated to culturally significant places, such as feudal Japan, rural India, or colonial Africa.

Shakespearean lines and phrases have become deeply embedded in folk wisdom, reflecting the timeless relevance of his works. His words, often poetic and profound, have transcended the stage to become part of everyday language, proverbial expressions, and cultural idioms. These lines are adapted, quoted, or paraphrased in folk literature and speech, offering moral lessons, witty insights, and universal truths.

Shakespearean characters have been absorbed into folk literature as archetypes, representing universal human traits, struggles, and moral dilemmas. These characters, reimagined and adapted, appear in folk tales, ballads, and oral traditions, where they often embody timeless qualities such as ambition, love, jealousy, or wisdom. Their transformation into archetypes ensures their relevance and integration into the cultural fabric of different societies. Shakespearean characters are reinterpreted to reflect regional cultural values and norms, making them relatable to local audiences. The characters are blended with existing folk archetypes or myths, creating hybrids that enrich both traditions.

Here are some examples of Shakespearean Archetypes in Folk Literature:

The Tragic Hero (Hamlet, Macbeth, Lear): Hamlet represents the thoughtful yet paralyzed seeker of truth, often reimagined as a prince, warrior, or village elder struggling with indecision. Macbeth's ambitious rise and fall parallels folk tales warning against overreaching and hubris, often symbolized by chieftains or kings in local lore. King Lear's descent into madness is adapted into cautionary tales about familial loyalty and the perils of pride.

The Star-Crossed Lovers (Romeo and Juliet): Romeo and Juliet epitomize doomed love, frequently adapted into regional tales of feuding families or lovers separated by social divisions. Folk traditions across

cultures use this archetype to explore the tragedy of love constrained by societal norms.

The Wise Fool (Feste, Touchstone, Falstaff): Shakespeare's fools and jesters, such as Feste (*Twelfth Night*) or Falstaff (*Henry IV*), inspire characters in folk tales who use wit, humor, and cleverness to outsmart others or impart wisdom.

The Ambitious Villain (Iago, Lady Macbeth): Iago (*Othello*) becomes the archetypal schemer in folk stories, representing betrayal and manipulation. Lady Macbeth's ruthless ambition is echoed in folk tales of power-hungry women, often portrayed as witches, queens, or cunning wives.

The Innocent Victim (Ophelia, Desdemona, Cordelia): Shakespeare's tragic heroines like Ophelia and Desdemona become symbols of innocence wronged, appearing in folk ballads that mourn their fate. Cordelia's loyalty in *King Lear* reflects archetypal filial piety, appearing in folk narratives about virtuous daughters.

The Mischievous Trickster (Puck): Puck from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* merges seamlessly with folk traditions of trickster spirits and fairies, embodying mischief and playful chaos.

The Revenge Seeker (Shylock, Hamlet): Shylock's quest for vengeance in *The Merchant of Venice* resonates with folk archetypes of wronged individuals seeking justice, often portrayed as both victim and villain.

Shakespeare's works share several thematic similarities with folk literature, reflecting universal human experiences such as love, betrayal, fate, and justice. These themes make his plays adaptable to different cultural traditions, where they blend seamlessly with folk storytelling, ballads, and theatrical performances. Below are some key themes that connect Shakespeare and folk literature: Plays like *Romeo and Juliet*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, and *Twelfth Night* explore love, courtship, and the obstacles lovers face. Many folk tales, such as *Tristan and Isolde* or *Layla and Majnun*, depict lovers separated by fate, family opposition, or social constraints, similar to *Romeo and Juliet*. *Macbeth*,

Hamlet, and *Julius Caesar* emphasize the role of fate, prophecy, and predetermined destiny in shaping human lives. Many folk stories include prophecies, curses, or supernatural forces guiding the hero's journey, such as in Greek and Norse mythology. Plays like *Hamlet*, *Othello*, and *King Lear* showcase betrayal among family members and friends, often leading to tragic consequences. Many folk legends revolve around betrayal and revenge, such as the stories of treacherous rulers, deceitful lovers, or vengeance-driven warriors. *Macbeth* and *Richard III* explore the dangers of unchecked ambition, showing how the desire for power can lead to downfall. Folk tales and epics, such as *The Mahabharata* and *Beowulf*, depict rulers and warriors whose ambitions lead to their rise or destruction. Many comedies, including *Twelfth Night* and *As You Like It*, involve characters disguising themselves to achieve their goals.

Folk stories often include heroes in disguise, whether to escape danger, test loyalty, or trick enemies, as seen in fairy tales like *Cinderella*. Witches in *Macbeth*, ghosts in *Hamlet*, and fairies in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* showcase his fascination with the supernatural. Folk stories often feature spirits, witches, and magical beings, such as **Baba Yaga** in **Slavic folklore** or the **fae** in **Celtic mythology**. *The Merchant of Venice* and *Measure for Measure* explore justice, mercy, and the consequences of moral choices. Many folk tales serve as moral lessons, warning against greed, dishonesty, or cruelty, reinforcing cultural values. *Hamlet*, *Othello*, and *Macbeth* feature flawed protagonists whose inner conflicts and weaknesses lead to their downfall. Folk epics and legends, such as King Arthur and Sigurd the Dragon Slayer, depict heroic figures who face tragic fates due to their flaws or circumstances.

Shakespeare and folk literature share common themes that resonate across cultures and generations. Whether through theatrical performances or oral storytelling, these themes reflect timeless human experiences, making Shakespeare's works relevant in folk traditions worldwide.

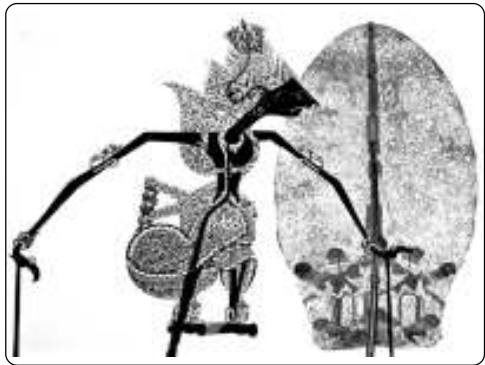
The connection between Shakespeare and folk literature highlights the universality and adaptability of his works. His plays, themes, and characters have transcended time and geography, seamlessly blending into folk traditions through ballads, proverbs, theater, and storytelling.

Folk literature, like Shakespeare's works, reflects fundamental human emotions and experiences, making their fusion natural and enduring. Shakespeare's works, though rooted in Elizabethan drama, have seamlessly merged with folk traditions, adapting to diverse cultural landscapes through oral narratives, ballads, and traditional theater. His characters and themes—love, betrayal, ambition, fate, and justice—resonate deeply across generations, making his influence evident in folk dramas like **Jatra** in India, **Kabuki** in Japan, and **Wayang Kulit** in Indonesia. Ultimately, the relationship between Shakespeare and folk literature underscores the power of shared narratives in preserving cultural heritage. Whether through a folk ballad sung in a village or a Shakespearean tragedy performed on a grand stage, his stories remind us of our collective human experience, proving that great literature knows no boundaries of time or geography.



Ninagawa Twelfth Night is directed by Yukio Ninagawa, fuses Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* with **Kabuki** aesthetics, featuring elaborate costumes and stylized performances.

In 2005, Pusaka, in collaboration with the British Council, developed a traditional Indonesian **Wayang Kulit** (shadow puppetry) adaptation of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. This production, titled *Macbeth in the Shadows*, was staged at the Kuala Lumpur Performing Arts Centre, showcasing the seamless fusion of Western literature with Southeast Asian traditional art forms.



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Performing Patriarchy: Theatrical Constructs of Womanhood in *Nagamandala*

P. Anusooya

Abstract

Nagamandala delves into the complexities of gender roles and the societal expectations imposed upon women in traditional Indian settings. The play narrates the story of Rani, a young bride confined by her husband, Appanna, who seeks solace outside their marriage. Through elements of folklore and mythology, Karnad portrays Rani's journey from subjugation to empowerment, challenging the patriarchal norms that define her existence. This paper examines how *Nagamandala* reflects the construction of the traditional woman, analyzing the transformation of Rani's character within the confines of societal expectations. By employing text analysis and theoretical frameworks, the study explores the dynamics of power, gender, and identity, highlighting the play's commentary on the roles prescribed to women and their agency within a patriarchal society. The findings reveal that while Rani's actions conform to traditional expectations, they also subvert and redefine them, offering a nuanced perspective on female empowerment within cultural constraints.

Keywords: Gender roles, Patriarchy, Folklore and mythology, Traditional woman, Subjugation and empowerment, Societal expectations, Female empowerment, Cultural constraints, Marriage and autonomy

Introduction

In traditional Indian society, women's roles have been predominantly defined by patriarchal norms, often limiting their agency and autonomy. Literature serves as a mirror to these societal constructs, providing insight into the lived experiences of women and the expectations placed

upon them. Girish Karnad's *Nagamandala* is a seminal work that critiques these constructs by weaving folklore and myth to depict the life of Rani, a woman navigating the complexities of marriage and societal expectations. The play addresses themes of fidelity, identity, and empowerment, challenging the conventional portrayal of women as passive beings. Through Rani's journey, Karnad questions the legitimacy of societal norms that confine women to traditional roles and explores the possibilities of redefining these roles from within the cultural framework. This paper aims to analyze how *Nagamandala* portrays the making of the traditional woman, examining the interplay between societal expectations and individual agency. By focusing on Rani's character development and the symbolic elements within the play, the study seeks to understand how traditional narratives can be both restrictive and liberating for women.

Literature Review

The examination of gender roles in Indian literature has been a subject of extensive scholarly discourse, with a significant focus on how traditional norms shape female identity and agency. Girish Karnad's *Nagamandala* is a notable contribution to this discourse, utilizing folklore and mythology to critique the patriarchal structures that confine women to predefined roles. This section reviews existing scholarship on gender representation in *Nagamandala*, the role of folklore in feminist narratives, and the broader implications of Karnad's work in the study of women's agency in literature.

Scholars have extensively analyzed *Nagamandala* as a feminist text that challenges the rigid frameworks of patriarchy. According to K. Satchidanandan (2001), Karnad's works often depict the struggles of individuals against oppressive societal norms, and *Nagamandala* is no exception. The play presents Rani as an archetype of the traditional woman, initially submissive but ultimately capable of redefining her role within marriage and society. Research by Meenakshi Mukherjee (2003) highlights that Rani's character exemplifies the paradox of female empowerment within patriarchal structures—while she gains agency, it is within the confines of socially acceptable frameworks such as marriage and motherhood.

Furthermore, Anupama Kaushal (2010) argues that *Nagamandala* employs the motif of confinement, both physical and psychological, to critique the domestic sphere as a site of female oppression. The stark contrast between Rani's real husband, Appanna, and the mystical Naga underscores the constructed nature of male authority and the possibility of subverting it through alternative narratives. This perspective is supported by Chandra Rajan (2012), who asserts that the play's use of myth and folklore serves to reframe traditional gender roles, making space for reinterpretation and resistance.

Folklore has historically been a means of preserving cultural values, but it has also functioned as a vehicle for subverting dominant ideologies. Asha Menon (2015) explores how Karnad reclaims oral narratives to challenge patriarchal traditions. By incorporating elements of Indian folklore, *Nagamandala* not only preserves cultural memory but also critiques the manner in which these narratives reinforce gender hierarchies.

T. Sasikala (2017) examines the role of magical realism in *Nagamandala*, arguing that it allows Karnad to blend realism with fantasy, creating a space where female agency can be explored without the constraints of historical accuracy. The transformation of Naga into Appanna represents the fluidity of identity and challenges the notion of a fixed, oppressive marital structure. This aligns with the findings of Ranjana Harish (2018), who posits that folklore in *Nagamandala* serves as an alternative discourse that reinterprets traditional gender norms, offering a critical commentary on the roles imposed on women.

Beyond *Nagamandala*, Karnad's oeuvre frequently engages with the theme of subaltern voices challenging hegemonic structures. His works, such as *Hayavadana* and *Yayati*, also explore gender, identity, and power dynamics. In a comparative study, Nandini Sen (2020) discusses how *Nagamandala* contributes to postcolonial feminist discourse by portraying women's resistance within culturally accepted frameworks. Unlike Western feminist narratives that often advocate direct confrontation, Karnad's approach suggests transformation through adaptation and subtle defiance.

Moreover, Kritika Sharma (2022) argues that *Nagamandala* resonates with contemporary feminist debates on consent, bodily autonomy, and the performative nature of gender roles. The play's emphasis on storytelling as a mode of survival and resistance mirrors the lived experiences of women in patriarchal societies, where subversion often occurs through indirect, symbolic acts rather than outright rebellion.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative text analysis approach to explore the intricate layers of *Nagamandala*, focusing on its narrative structure, character development, and symbolic elements. By closely analyzing the dialogues, interactions, and transformations of the protagonist, Rani, the study aims to reveal the deeper themes surrounding the societal construction of traditional female roles.

The research applies feminist theoretical frameworks and gender studies perspectives to interpret Rani's experiences within the play. These perspectives offer critical insights into how her journey reflects both compliance with and resistance to patriarchal norms. By dissecting the ways in which Karnad crafts her character—through language, symbolism, and dramatic structure—the study sheds light on the broader discourse of gender and agency in Indian society.

Additionally, the study examines the interplay between folklore and lived realities, recognizing how *Nagamandala* merges myth with social critique. By analyzing the text within its cultural and historical context, this research provides a nuanced understanding of how the play simultaneously upholds and challenges traditional gender norms. This method ensures a comprehensive exploration of Rani's role and the broader implications of her transformation, emphasizing how literature serves as both a reflection of and a response to societal expectations placed upon women.

Findings and Discussion

Girish Karnad's *Nagamandala* presents a layered examination of the traditional roles assigned to women, particularly through the character of Rani. Initially, she is portrayed as a submissive and obedient wife,

reflecting societal expectations of women as chaste, loyal, and passive. Her confinement by Appanna symbolizes the limitations imposed upon women within patriarchal structures, curbing both their physical and emotional freedom. This is evident when Rani voices her feelings of isolation and fear: “I sit at home, bolted in, waiting. Every night. Every day. Why? What have I done?” (Karnad 23). Her statement encapsulates the restrictive environment that traditional gender roles often impose on women.

The arrival of the mystical Naga, who takes on Appanna’s form, becomes the turning point in Rani’s life. Through her encounters with Naga, she experiences emotions such as affection and desire, which had been suppressed under conventional marital norms. Karnad’s use of folklore challenges rigid notions of fidelity and virtue, reframing Rani’s relationship with Naga as a form of self-discovery rather than transgression. This transformation is marked by her own admission: “I don’t know who comes at night. But I wait for him” (Karnad 39). The ambiguity in this statement blurs the conventional boundaries between morality and desire, raising questions about the societal constructs that define purity and sin.

Rani’s ultimate test—where she holds the cobra to prove her chastity—reinterprets traditional narratives by emphasizing her agency. Instead of succumbing to victimhood, she asserts control over her destiny. The imagery of Rani holding the cobra without fear is particularly symbolic, signifying her reclamation of power. Karnad describes the moment as, “She picks up the King Cobra and holds it on her lap. It spreads its hood and swings, but does not strike” (Karnad 55). This scene marks a shift in Rani’s character from a passive sufferer to an individual who navigates societal norms on her own terms. Her assertion, “The truth is what people believe it to be” (Karnad 57), challenges the rigid frameworks that dictate gender roles and moral expectations, suggesting that truth is often shaped by collective perception rather than absolute principles.

Through folklore, Karnad redefines female identity, illustrating that even within traditional confines, women can assert their agency. The oral storytelling tradition used in *Nagamandala* provides a platform to

rework patriarchal myths, offering alternative interpretations of women's roles in society. Rani's evolution throughout the play underscores resilience and self-determination, proving that tradition and empowerment are not mutually exclusive. Her final declaration, "I have been faithful to my husband in body and soul. If I lie, let the cobra bite me" (Karnad 56), serves as both a strategic assertion of autonomy and a commentary on societal expectations. While her words appear to conform to traditional ideals, they also demonstrate her ability to maneuver within these constraints to redefine her own narrative.

The symbolism within *Nagamandala* further highlights the tension between societal expectations and personal agency. Appanna represents rigid patriarchy, while Naga embodies transformation and fluidity, reflecting the forces that shape Rani's evolving consciousness. The snake, beyond its supernatural connotations, serves as a metaphor for Rani's inner growth and the reconfiguration of her identity. Her encounters with Naga allow her to step beyond imposed limitations, culminating in an assertion of selfhood rather than subjugation.

Furthermore, the folktale framework reinforces the fluid nature of gender roles and societal perceptions. By embedding Rani's story within folklore, Karnad blurs the lines between reality and myth, demonstrating that traditional structures can be reimagined. This interplay between narrative and identity suggests that even long-standing cultural norms are subject to reinterpretation, allowing for shifts in gender dynamics over time.

Ultimately, Rani's transformation in *Nagamandala* challenges the assumption that traditional roles are inherently restrictive. Instead, the play suggests that these roles, when reinterpreted, can provide avenues for female empowerment. Karnad's integration of myth and folklore, coupled with his intricate portrayal of Rani, showcases the possibility of self-assertion within culturally defined boundaries. As Rani stands before the village elders and confidently proclaims her truth, she does not merely conform to societal expectations—she actively reshapes them. In doing so, she exemplifies the complex interplay of gender, power, and self-identity in the context of Indian society.

Girish Karnad's *Nagamandala* critically examines the rigid definitions of femininity by intertwining folklore with contemporary gender discourse. Through the transformation of Rani—from a submissive and obedient wife to an empowered figure—the play reflects the struggles of women who navigate oppressive societal structures while asserting their agency. Karnad challenges conventional notions of fidelity, chastity, and female subservience, thereby expanding the discourse on gender roles in Indian society.

The play's use of folklore as a structural and thematic tool enables a flexible interpretation of morality and social constructs. As Asha Menon observes, "The folktale tradition in *Nagamandala* allows for a subversive reading of patriarchal ideologies, granting women an alternative space to assert their agency" (132). This narrative device disrupts rigid binaries of virtue and transgression, permitting Rani's evolution beyond a victimized figure into one who actively negotiates power within traditional confines. Her final act—holding the cobra, a trial traditionally meant to affirm chastity—becomes an assertion of self-determination. As Karnad writes, "She picks up the King Cobra and holds it on her lap. It spreads its hood and swings, but does not strike" (55). The imagery symbolizes her reclamation of agency, transforming a patriarchal test into a moment of self-empowerment.

Rani's journey also reflects the socially constructed nature of gender roles. Meenakshi Mukherjee highlights how Karnad's reworking of folklore "questions the absolute nature of truth, positioning Rani's experience as both a challenge to and a reinterpretation of societal expectations" (112). Her relationship with Naga complicates traditional definitions of fidelity, shifting the focus from rigid moral codes to personal transformation. When Rani states, "I don't know who comes at night. But I wait for him" (Karnad 39), she challenges the patriarchal notion that a woman's worth is determined solely by her adherence to societal ideals of purity. Instead, her experience is framed as an assertion of suppressed emotions and desires, aligning with feminist readings that advocate for women's autonomy over their bodies and choices.

Furthermore, Karnad presents Rani as both a subject of patriarchal control and an agent of resistance. Sunita Rani notes that "the serpent

in *Nagamandala* functions as a metaphor for Rani's evolving consciousness, representing her transformation from passivity to self-awareness" (145). The contrast between Appanna—who embodies rigid patriarchal authority—and Naga—who represents fluidity and change—underscores the competing forces that shape her identity. Ultimately, her declaration before the village elders, "I have been faithful to my husband in body and soul. If I lie, let the cobra bite me" (Karnad 56), strategically employs societal expectations to secure her autonomy rather than passively conforming to them.

Through its engagement with folklore and gender discourse, *Nagamandala* critiques patriarchal oppression while illustrating the possibility of empowerment within cultural constraints. By portraying Rani as both bound by and capable of redefining tradition, Karnad offers a nuanced exploration of female agency. As Mukherjee asserts, "Folklore, as used in *Nagamandala*, is not just a storytelling device but a means of subverting hegemonic narratives and reshaping women's roles" (118). Rani's journey exemplifies the complexities of gendered existence, proving that while traditional structures may seek to confine women, they also hold the potential for resistance and transformation.

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The Making and Distribution of Hindi Films in Kolkata: A Case Study [2016-2023]

Monikinkini Basu

Abstract

Film promotions have seen a dramatic shift of focus from posters to the promotional events and from there on to advertisements and endorsements. It has drastically shifted and crafted itself from the realms of old world film publicity that had the content of the film in mind while promoting itself for the audience, to the new age multidimensional propaganda of films that twists the sinewy plots to accommodate the stardom of the actors that would eventually lead to the improvised endorsements and better promotion of the film among the audience.

The notion of Film poster had primarily been a negotiation for the function that it perforates the idea of the content of the movie or its prime focus into the mind of the prospective viewers. But the phenomenon underwent a change during the progress of the film industries around the world. In the Hindi Film Industry, which is primarily based in Mumbai, the trend has been observed in the late 1900. The projection of the prime character, or the Hero or Heroine in the posters has been penned highlighting their character portrayal on screen. The crucial issue being the exploitation of 'Brand Bollywood' and the hype surged by a certain actor/actress during a certain period of time, the Film Industry has seen the larger-than-life 'Hero-Worship' that has resulted in the evaluation of an actor in terms of the box-office reviews.

In this paper I shall explore the role of theatres in the framing of this market for the films and the associated case study shall look at the film

screening theatres as a notion of a space of deep rooted politics of representation.

Keywords: Case-study, theatre, body, audience, spectacle.

On April 20, 1921, *The Times of India* published an article titled, “Indian Film Making: The Latest Production” enlisting a grand success of Madan Theatres Ltd. *The Times of India* (In the special edition of the *Uncut* edition published in 2013), quotes *The Statesman* and Anshul Chaturvedi writes,

“When Madan Theatres Ltd., embarked on film production they decided that their work should be on a par with the best Western studios, and to this end they engaged expert producers, directors and camera men from Europe. That they have succeeded in their ambitious project... will be plainly evident to all who see the release at the Cornwallis Theatre of the first “Super Select Oriental Film”. (Chaturvedi 5)

To revive the theatre, the use of the special screening was done to embark upon the audience the need for a theatre space which would be good to screen films and not be stereotyped as a popular hall for screening of recent films. Here, the report of *The Times of India* has been apparently interesting enough to be reported taking the context of a previous report from a competing newspaper for the relevant audience to feel a certain attraction towards the history of the theatre that screened undeclared film that has been launched under a certain banner. It is seen to be having an approach of positive publicity to market one of the earliest examples of Hindi film of the nation. At this point what is interesting to note is, when the publicity is done it is not concerned about the content of the film. Rather than the content, the presentation and moreover the acceptance of the banner is made the issue of emphasis here. Therefore, it may be said that the audience receptivity is targeted towards the emergence of the creation of a brand that Hindi film industry was yet to become. Repeated referencing can be read as the basic of the repeated appeal to the audience.

This trend has continued till the present day. The marketing strategy of the film has not shifted at all from its standpoint of alienated market survey. By this I mean that the market is judged and trends are created with the help of the launch ideas. Different ways of promoting a film are formulated and this is done systematically to ensure that the films meet a market ready for its reception. These do not necessarily involve themselves with the content of a film, but create a cult for the film that is based on a trendsetting actor, who makes his identity unique to his flagship as a star rather than a performer. The performer is always absent in the propaganda. The star, on the other hand, is always catering to the demands of the structure of publicity. The 'star', who apparently holds the key to the success of a film, is actually carved out of a performer designed by a team of propagandists. This is the assertion that is latent in the article, quoted at the beginning of this chapter but it needs further inspection.

In a chapter titled, "The Production and Distribution of Hindi Films" of his book, *Oxford India Short Introductions: Bollywood*, M. K. Raghavendra says,

"The term 'Bollywood' used for popular Hindi cinema suggests that Hindi cinema had been institutionalised like Hollywood in the organisation of film-making and distribution, but this is hardly a fact. Historically, the term 'studio system' applied to Hollywood refers to the practice of large motion picture studios between the 1920s and the 1960s of producing movies primarily on their own film-making lots using creative personnel usually under long term contract and dominating exhibition through vertical integration, that is, the ownership or effective control of distribution and exhibition."¹ (Raghavendra 14)

Just as Raghavendra argues, that the people involved with the filmmaking are in a position of strength about the production and distribution of the film since the saleability evident in the production design. The way the film is marketed is important because it manifests the way in which the film should address the prospective audience. It creates the divide among the audience regarding the choice of films that

they make and how it produces different categories of audience in the industry. These audiences are then taken into confidence and convinced that the necessity of viewership rests with a certain category of audience for a certain film that is made. The team never preserves the integrated ideology of film aesthetics and the creative licence of the director when thinking about the marketing strategy. The market-value of a film depends on many crucial factors that trade-analysts try to understand and implement.

The trend of using the contents of a film to propagate it to a certain audience is a tried and tested formula. It works while the propaganda for the film is not always related to the audience's interest in the plot could be in the theme of the propaganda. In her book, *Bollywood: A Guidebook to Popular Hindi Cinema*, Tejaswini Ganti writes,

“The most striking feature of the Bombay film industry is its entrepreneurial and fragmented nature in all three sectors: production, distribution and exhibition. The industry comprises independent producers, distributors, financiers, exhibitors and independent audio companies. All three sectors of the film industry are run by family-films, which is the dominant characteristic of business activity in India.” (Ganti 56)

The ‘family film business’ that most production houses are an example of, is just one part of the game. The prosperity of the business house is always more important than the actual production of popular content and this restricts the growth of an artist making him a businessman in the process. Many popular actors and directors are getting involved in production houses and in the making of films. The reason obviously differs from what they claim it to be and what the market readers take it to be. The plastic² glory of these stars is something that apprehends itself on the psyche of the audience. With the humongous presentation of the ‘hero’ in Hindi film industry and the accentuated tapestry of their larger-than-life presence in the film propaganda, the lives of ‘film stars’ have taken a shape according to the demands of the marketing industry. With the change in lookout, the change in attitude has also been brought into consideration. The pragmatic cinema lover has started believing not

only in the plot but also has believed in the power of the self-publicity (done by the actor) of late. The image of the 'stars' has been created in the image of the unparalleled self-esteem that the common man subjects himself to think. The cinema goer is now not a person dazzled by the glory of publicity but is someone who is keen to know about the trends that are created in the form of a film propagation. The cinema enthusiast is affected by the trends and the psyche is suited to the idea of being updated with the information regarding a particular actor or a so-called 'star'.

Reminder Kaur and Ajay J. Sinha in their book, *Bollywood: Popular Indian Cinema through a Transnational Lens* says,

“Whatever technological, narrative and aesthetic dimensions were incorporated into films, they presented a relationship of *difference*, providing a parallel to Partha Chatterjee’s (1986) arguments on Indian Nationalism, namely that is borrowed from elsewhere, continued to dialogue with the outside and eventually became a force to be reckoned with both inside and outside of its bordered territories.” (Kaur and Sinha 19)

This difference in the Hindi film industry was seen in the beginning of 90’s era since the production management began to contribute differently to the presentation of a film in Indian and foreign markets. The way in which films have proceeded from a particular time to the present day is a journey of what difference it has made and how the difference has been created across the time in which the form of film has travelled. The journey of the film industry had the past methods of publicity as a point of reference. At present publicity has become a necessary part of the film’s production cost.

In the 1920s the theatres showing films in India became a massive revolution but with the introduction of the multiplexes in India what came about was the competitive multi-screen dimension to this narrative. Multiplexes have developed a demanding³ audience, but the single screen theatres have survived in the small towns without much effort. However, to survive in the metropolitan cities the small screens have been struggling severely. In the first part of the series of interviews conducted with the

proprietors of single screen cinema halls in Kolkata, I had come across these facts:

Field Survey: Interview of the Single Screen Theatre Owners

I had intended to interview the owners/proprietors of Basushree, Star Theatre, Jayanti and Mallika cinema halls, but could not conduct the interview of the proprietor of Star Theatre because of non-availability. I could however conduct interviews with the three others on the list. Two of the above-mentioned theatres, Jayanti and Mallika are located far north of the metropolitan area, and Basushree is situated in South Calcutta. The geographical locations of these cinema halls are also relevant to their different approaches to lure the audiences into their sometimes-non-air-conditioned halls which function without many facilities.

The idea was to select different cinema halls among others who have not changed their format of shows and yet are still around with screenings of different films. The halls in question were Basushree, Mallika Cinema and Jayanti, Barrackpore. However, interestingly, the proprietors of Basushree, Mallika and Jayanti were not very reluctant but rather interested in the interview. I had a set of questions for them which I shall include here. Their answers were divergent. Yet they had some common links in terms of circumstances through which they had to pass through in order to make their cinema halls run shows even when the audience had become prone to visit the multiplexes. To these people, the experience of watching a film does not necessarily centre on physical comfort and they claim that their halls to be more renowned but less comfortable. For the owner of Jayanti, a sweeping statement was common, “If you want a comfortable watch, go to Inox, if you are a common man, come to Jayanti”. This categorization of the cinema hall has been very popular amongst the audience of the suburban area and a group of audience (in the age frame of twenty and thirty) were eager to talk about the style of the hall and told me when asked, “We come here because we do not want to miss out on the new release because it is the end of the month”. The economic aspect of the acceptance of single screen theatres is somewhat significant since it attracts audiences in large numbers. The effect on the revenue is positive

since the money collected is not drained on the paraphernalia of presentation to the audience. The people who watch a film in these theatres know what they have signed up for. Jayanti being a converted multiplex was a local favourite for the film loving audience. Jayanti at one point was a single screen theatre which was later turned into a low budget and self-financed cinema hall by the same owners. There were three screens and a snacks counter. The set up was such that the people would get the idea of it being a new-found kind of a film screening space which is somewhere between the multiplex and the single screen theatre.

Case Study 1: Basushree

Date of Interview: 28.12.2016

Place: Basushree Cinema, Shyama Prasad Mukherjee Road, Kalighat Kolkata.

Co-Owner/Proprietor: Mr. Sourav Bose

After many unofficial conversations with Mr. Bose, I finally had an official interview with him at the office of his cinema-hall. A crowd had just dispersed after a screening of *Dangal* (2016), a film in which Aamir Khan was playing a wrestler and initiator of wrestling among his daughters. Based on the true narrative of the Phogat family, the film had made 'good business' in most of the halls in Kolkata, according to Mr. Bose. The film was accepted and made a market for itself perhaps because the theme was overcoming barriers to achieve one's goal. When we started talking about the reaction of the audience, Bose took us to the screening hall to see the last scene of the film. Bose also allowed my friend and photographer, Kaustav Manna to click photographs of his theatre as the space in question (the cinema hall) and the change in projection system that he had installed over the years had seen drastic changes over the last decade. In 2008, he had changed to UFO⁴ projection and the hall still has the same projector running. Apparently the projection of a hall determined the interest of the audience. But I would like to differ from Bose here since, the projection basically talks about the technical knowledge of a film's presentation and what the people rather

like to see on screen is the certification from their known brands and that makes all the difference to them, not the quality of the execution. He added that he was one of the first cinema hall owners to have switched to the digital viewership experience. However, he plans to change its version and update the viewing experience for the audience. The audience however, is absolutely unaware of these technical changes: this is what I gathered from talking to a few members of the audience who had come out after *Dangal* (which I shall talk about later in the chapter). For them, says Bose, ‘the price of the ticket is what matters’. (Bose) This is another aspect that the single screen theatres are playing with. They screen the same film that is being screened at a multiplex at a lower operating cost. As a result, the tickets cost less and the number of spectators is higher per show, especially if it is an afternoon or evening show.

Case Study 2: Mallika Cinema

Date of Interview: 11.12.2018

Place: Mallika Cinema, Feeder Road, Shyamnagar.

Owner/Proprietor: Mr. Madan Mallick

Unlike the bilingual interview of Bose, this interview was conducted in Bengali and the translation is mine. The question about multiplexes was farfetched, but it brought about a reply that was unexpected⁵ from a theatre owner. Mr. Mallick said, multiplex was a different kind of audience puller. For his hall, the main target was the lower middle-class section of the society which meant that his business would never fall drastically due to operation of the multiplexes. He added that the audiences at his hall do not mind the picture quality and the associated trouble of seats⁶ since they get to see the film at a very low cost⁷. On being asked about the male body in film posters he was of the opinion that aestheticizing and sexualizing of the stars’ bodies has always been a part of the appeal for the audience. But according to him, the commoditization of male body has been there from the time of Amitabh Bachchan and therefore, it may be a process that has changed its form but not its fundamental intention. He added that “the beauty of a film is in the

notion of its hero and heroine being physically appealing to a large number of audiences. If the audience does not find the actors good to look at, they would not be interested in their on-screen chemistry and we will have no takers.” His hall is extremely old and unplanned⁸. One has to go through a small by-lane to reach the hall and it is not very appealing to a young crowd. His audience is mostly the lower income group working class. The rickshaw pullers and the auto drivers were his target audience. Though he categorises them among the working class, this section of the audience is never going to be away from entertainment for a long time, nor will they go into any fancy place to watch a movie. Mallick said, “We bring a film to the hall while the film has finished its business in the other halls. We are popularly called the video hall. We play films on video cassettes and not by bringing reels. As a result, the cost of screening is nothing compared to the others. They can therefore cater to an audience who are not known as film-buffs⁹ by the present generation.” (Mallick)

He also articulated the fact that in order to bring the revenue collections up to par with the current times, he has to permit the running of B-grade movies in his hall during the afternoon. This being very popular among the audiences, it contributes hugely to the total revenue of the hall. He adds that it is either “Bollywood” or the B- grade films or a bit of both that runs at cinema houses these days. The video hall structure in which he operates is a very intricate structure that has to keep a lot of people happy. By this he indicates that he needs to bribe certain people in order to let the hall function properly. About the so-called villains he shared his opinion in almost the same light as the other interviewee. He opined that the villains need to be larger than life in order for the hero to become the screen-deity. The conversation ended but he refused to let my photographer click photos of his hall, and was vocal about the fact that the ill maintained corridors would not be a good example for the survey. The truth remains that his cinema hall needs a facelift but he deliberately keeps it low-key for the simple reason that the halls need to be undermining and non- appealing to the uninformed audience who do not know about the pattern of operation of these halls. The fact that the hall is a B-grade and a video hall is not

very positive as a feedback to the image of the owner. Mallick is not sorry to be looking for an audience who are experienced. His audience is aware of the functions of the hall and the fact that in the afternoons there are screenings of B-grade films. Here the audience grows by word of mouth and not by posters. He does not spend on publicity but rather makes it seem that his hall is like a bubble which might disappear on being scrutinised by the public eye. Every evening he makes it a point to visit the hall and collect the revenue but he says that, the revenue has been very consistent and the cost of operation being affordable, he has no plans of closing down his hall.

Case Study 3: Jayanti Cinema

Date of Interview: 27.11.2020

Place: Jayanti Cinema, B.T. Road, Barrackpore, Kolkata

Owner/Proprietor/ Manager: Anonymous (Anonymous)

The state of this hall has had a complete makeover in 2011 when they installed three screens and renamed the hall as Jayanti Multiplex. The idea as the proprietor puts it, was to allure audience and hence it was expected to boast the revenue of the hall which was falling drastically. Not only did they install screens but also had a disco bar attached to the hall along with a shopping complex. The hall has refashioned itself in the modern scene and given utmost importance to the comfort and needs of the audience. It however remains inferior in comparison to the actual multiplexes that are functional everywhere in the city. A Multiplex is generally a large body of business that has its branches across the city and the country. It does not operate as a single unit. Thus, it becomes easy for the multiplex to maintain a certain standard in the service that it provides.

The proprietor was of the opinion that since the change in the format of the hall, they have never looked back to the days of bad revenue collections and other associated problems of crowd pulling. The idea for this change was a boon for them and at the same time in different shows they can screen different movies without one interrupting the other. The single screens mostly have two or more movies running on

the same dates and yet it was a big step for them to install the two other screens to fall into the multiplex format. His audience is mostly the remotely¹⁰ placed crowd and not the local dwellers of Barrackpore. The divide in the audience is very distinct since most local cinema halls cater to the audience who come to Barrackpore for the comfort of a mediocre provision of entertainment which is not very lavish but comfortable. This category of audience has made a positive impact on the revenue earned by Jayanti Cinema in the last few years, according to him.

On being asked about the change in the audience's mindset about the body of a film actor, he added that not only films but even television and theatre had more commoditizing of the body than real content. For the present generation, being shaped by habits of body-shaming the self, it was necessary to highlight the importance of fitness.

Jayanti was once the most important hall in a locality which was far from the districts of Nadia and Behrampur (which is very far from the metropolitan Kolkata) but not exactly in the vicinity of Kolkata. This had been a very important factor in determining the size of audience for the hall. It was also a determining factor since this kind of audience demanded a different kind of film. The manager said, "It was important to note the changes in the pattern of the audience in the theatre. When the Bengali film industry changed its modes and the likes of Dev and Jeet¹¹ became popular, their films had a major fan base and needed a lot of screen time from the single screen theatres". (Manager) So, the shift was justified.

It was difficult to note that the change in viewership should be so varied within a few kilometres. A very popular cinema hall in Khardah was converted to a banquet hall since it had absolutely no audience connection after a certain point. It is more or less dependent on the personal wealth of these small screen owners and their financiers. Mallick had pointed out, "Our financiers are powerful but they choose not to come to the forefront because it creates the situational crisis since their other identity will be at stake." He explains animatedly that the political connect of these 'financers' is extremely important and that this is their primary source of wealth. This makes it evident that the theatres will

actually be run on the public money and will be monitored by the preying eyes of people with power and authority. The implementation of the 'save the theatres' which was a populist slogan around Mumbai in the time of Covid-19 pandemic. When I revisited Jayanti cinema hall in 2022, they were completely different in their approach towards their audience. The financial loss was clear but the hall was still functional while the disco had closed down and the wider known shopping brand was replaced by a lesser-known brand. I had to talk to the manager and find out that the pandemic had made the hall a shadow of what it used to be before.

After the interview with all three proprietors, I had a clearer vision of the situation in which the cinema halls were in, both in Kolkata and in its suburban areas. It is very confusing to note the different trends in the different geographical spaces of the location of these theatres. While a completely suburban hall turns itself to part B-grade cinema screen and a semi-urban area turns itself to a multiplex, the city hall remains a single screen that hosts multiple shows in different time slots. The reception of Hindi Movies is so varied¹² in Kolkata's multiplexes and single screens. The variety is everywhere but what makes Kolkata a typical case study is that the local films are hardly the pronounced challenge here. The influence of the Hindi film industry is what determines the status of a cinema hall. The most number of shows are run for the Hindi films and the prime slots are given for the same. It's a far-fetched comment perhaps but the honest opinion about the cinema hall is that it caters to the taste of the revenue earners and business professionals who look into the realm of cinema as a market of earning more compared to the otherwise melting market. The strategy for marketing a film based on its reception amongst the audience and the tried and tested formulae of categorising films into most suitable, less acceptable and least expected have made the theatres places of only business calculations instead of being an entertainment house. The imbalance is getting worse day by day.

After the series of interviews conducted with the owners and managers of different single screen theatres in Kolkata, the idea that popped up was quite clear. The evidence of unanimous blaming of multiplexes for ruining the 'essence' of cinema and the confused and different sets of

audience was at the core of the discussion. The halls are in the shadow of gloom but are functional. OTT had made multiplexes backdated while multiplexes had consumed single screen cinema halls.

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Footnotes

1. In the beginning of the chapter, Raghavendra talks about the system of making films that are basically in sync with the system of the much established Hollywood industry since it is a mark of the Hindi film industry being in a way equivalent to the system used in the largest international film industry.

2. Plastic because it is created artificially and made popular through methods that are designed with the objective of making the audiences believe that they are demi-gods.
3. Audience is adjusted to certain comforts like the air conditioned cinema halls and availability of recliners instead of seats.
4. Apparently the projection of a hall determined the interest of the audience. But I would like to differ from Bose here since, the projection basically talks about the technical knowledge of a film 's presentation and what the people rather like to see on screen is the certification from their known brands and that makes all the difference to them, not the quality of the execution.
5. Once again, in an interview, the stereotypes are extremely pronounced. While Bose confirmed to most of them, Mallick did not. The rusticity that the cinema hall had was balanced by some of the more opinionated answers that Mallick gave me.
6. The hall has old fashioned wooden seats which can be hardly comfortable.
7. Mallika is a video hall. It screens the cinema after it has been in the other theatres for a while. They get pirated copies of the film and play it in their hall. This gives Mr. Mallick the ease of screening the film at a low cost.
8. Before 2010 it did not have a fire exit and a fire alarm service installed in the main hall. It just had two fire extinguishers which was not in the best of state.
9. People who do not have the eagerness of waiting for a video of a film to be released before it is watched by them. Film enthusiasts are popularly called film buffs. It's a more commonplace term for a film enthusiast.
10. People who stay in the Nadia district of West Bengal consider Barrackpore to be the nearest city. They come here to eat at restaurants and watch movies and sometimes do their shopping. They need to travel around three to four hours to reach Kolkata but they reach Barrackpore within two hours.

11. Names of two heroes of the Bengali film industry who have similar categories of films marketed. These are almost like duplications of the Hindi films that had the concept of six-pack and eight-pack at the basis of its popularity. They have been functional in making Tollywood (the Bengali film industry) be at par with the Hindi film industry and its current content.
12. The variety is everywhere but what makes Kolkata a typical case study is that the local films are hardly the pronounced challenge here. The influence of the Hindi film industry is what determines the status of a cinema hall. The most number of shows are run for the Hindi films and the prime slots are given for the same.

**One Face, Many Habits: Film Adaptation of
Shakespearean Theatre as an Agent of Socio-Cultural
Mediation in Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood***

Gargi Bhattacharya

Abstract

The phenomenon of Shakespearean adaptations in film was already more than half a century old when Kurosawa filmed *Throne of Blood* in 1957. What was remarkable about his adaptation was that it not only completely uprooted a Shakespearean text from its own socio-cultural context and placed it in the terrain of a medieval Japanese mythical-allegorical construct, but also that it never borrowed a single line from the original. The film is structured not around the *fabula* (story), but the *syuzhet* (plot) of the original—the essence rather than the form. It deals with human action set in a cultural and philosophical framework very different from that of Shakespeare. While Shakespeare's tragic hero remained immortal in his transgressive atrocities, embodying the Renaissance 'overreacher' in his most glorified, celebrated manifestation, Kurosawa shifts the emphasis from individual to the social in his titular foregrounding of not the hero but the object of his pursuit—the throne of blood. There is an essential stylistic typicality about Kurosawa's work, and the basic ingredients which comprise the dramatic universe of the film—horses, castles, warriors, hills, forests and moments of quiet dramatic intensity within enclosed spaces are derived from the Noh theatrical tradition of Japan. Though the film had been discounted by Geoffrey Reeves and Peter Brook as a Shakespearean film "because it doesn't use the text" (quoted in Davies, 154), it has become, in retrospect, a cinematic masterpiece and part of our thinking of Shakespeare's play. To that effect, this paper would endeavour to explore a telescopic segment

of Shakespeare's rites of passage from being an erstwhile national property of England to the domesticated familiar of a country as far topographically, historically, and culturally as Japan. It is an effort that is oriented, through the evaluative analysis of Akira Kurosawa's cinematic rendering of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (c.1606)—the celebrated 1957 Japanese version *Kumonosu-djo* (which means literally *The Castle of the Spider's Web*), subtitled in English as *Throne of Blood*, towards comprehending the intricacies of the process by which a Shakespearean text is transmuted to the cinematic medium to produce a corpus of dense cultural codifications, grounded firmly in the matrix of socio-economic and political realities of Japan, not to mention the director's own personal aesthetic vision. This academic endeavour is also directed towards an interrogation of the categories of 'violence' and 'ambition' as understood by Kurosawa in his own politico-historical context, and also of how that conception might differ from, or identify with, a late Renaissance playwright's.

Keywords: Shakespeare, film, adaptation, Macbeth, Kurosawa

An Introduction: Film and Theatre—Some Inherent Paradoxes

The phenomenon of Shakespearean adaptations in film was already more than half a century old when Kurosawa filmed *Throne of Blood* in 1957. What was remarkable about his adaptation was that it not only completely uprooted a Shakespearean text from its own socio-cultural context and placed it in the terrain of a medieval Japanese mythical-allegorical construct, but also that it never borrowed a single line from the original. The film is structured not around the *fabula* (story), but the *syuzhet* (plot) of the original—the essence rather than the form. It deals with human action set in a cultural and philosophical framework very different from that of Shakespeare. While Shakespeare's tragic hero remained immortal in his transgressive atrocities, embodying the Renaissance 'overreacher' in his most glorified, celebrated manifestation, Kurosawa shifts the emphasis from individual to the social in his titular foregrounding of not the hero but the object of his pursuit—the throne of blood. There is an essential stylistic typicality about Kurosawa's work, and the basic ingredients which comprise the dramatic universe

of the film—horses, castles, warriors, hills, forests and moments of quiet dramatic intensity within enclosed spaces are derived from the Noh theatrical tradition of Japan. Though the film had been discounted by Geoffrey Reeves and Peter Brook as a Shakespearean film “because it doesn’t use the text” (quoted in Davies, 154), it has become, in retrospect, a cinematic masterpiece and part of our thinking of Shakespeare’s play.

To that effect, this paper would endeavour to explore a telescopic segment of Shakespeare’s rites of passage from being an erstwhile national property of England to the domesticated familiar of a country as far topographically, historically, and culturally as Japan. It is an effort that is oriented, through the evaluative analysis of Akira Kurosawa’s cinematic rendering of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* (c.1606)—the celebrated 1957 Japanese version *Kumonosu-djo* (which means literally *The Castle of the Spider’s Web*), subtitled in English as *Throne of Blood*, towards comprehending the intricacies of the process by which a Shakespearean text is transmuted to the cinematic medium to produce a corpus of dense cultural codifications, grounded firmly in the matrix of socio-economic and political realities of Japan, not to mention the director’s own personal aesthetic vision. This academic endeavour is also directed towards an interrogation of the categories of ‘violence’ and ‘ambition’ as understood by Kurosawa in his own politico-historical context, and also of how that conception might differ from, or identify with, a late Renaissance playwright’s.

Adaptations of Shakespeare and Shakespeare’s Adaptations: Displacement of the Don

So, how did Shakespeare ‘come into the picture’, so to speak? By the 1920s, the making and selling of films entailed increasingly high outlays and correspondingly high risks, and there was already an undeclared trade war between United States and Europe. It was their prestige value, or the power of a particular film star, that recommended Shakespearean projects to companies to film companies and gradually overcame their reluctance. Although none of the first wave of Shakespearean sound films was a financial success, they laid the foundation of Shakespeare’s later, extensive corporate encounters, which

led to a displacement of the authorial texts through a chain of, what Derrida would call, difference and deference.

The forces of imperialism and globalisation had, on the other hand, made Shakespeare a household name, having been encountered by vast number of students as words on the printed page which have undergone exhaustive scholarly research and bibliographic explication, so that, in addition to their regular canonical stardom, his plays have generated an immense volume of centrifugal literature. Different cultures confronted the supreme cultural icon of Britain, few bypassed his influence, but most adopted (and adapted) him in a manner exclusively their own, chiselling away at his giant, larger-than-life stature to make him more accessible, more comprehensible, and more amenable to their sensibilities. Says Richard Hapern:

Shakespeare has attracted more critical attention of an anthropological type than any other major author in the English canon. The most recent instances of this, in the works of New Historicists, have generally been portrayed as lying on the other side of the line that separates modernist from post-modernist theory... Modernism set the terms for our century's reading of Shakespeare, and it did so by displacing him from his given 'niche' in English culture. Today, whether viewing Akira Kurosawa's adaptations of Shakespearean drama or reading an essay by Stephen Greenblatt...we are likely to find a Shakespeare moved somehow outside the boundaries of Europe. This fact is not a mere curiosity or hindsight; it is central to our century's reception of Shakespeare and of English Renaissance more generally.

(Hapern, 1)

Having thus heralded the flourish of Shakespeare's advent into a world as full of glamour and simulation as his plays, this paper will have a look at how Kurosawa conceived of violence as not merely an explicit, visceral construct, but an amorphous, implicit presence. In the process, we have a film which seeks to be an aesthetic equivalent of the Shakespearean text, although disconnected from it in terms of its representation of a social context altogether removed from the one

conceived by the playwright. It has thereby extended the frontiers of discussion on the play, and has made Western scholarship more aware of the cinematic potential of Shakespeare's dramatic material.

However, prior to taking a headlong plunge into the debate of whether the screen adaptation of his play was faithful to Shakespeare's artistic intent, it would serve us well to remember that his repertoire was none the richer in originality, he himself having had adapted from multiple sources. Apart from Holinshed's accounts of Scottish history, *Macbeth* drew upon William Stewart's *Buik of the Croniclis of Scotland* (1558), Leslie's *De Origine, Moribus et Rebus Gestis Scotorum* (1578) and Skene's *Scots Acts* (1597).¹ Aware of the political and social context in which the play would be produced, Shakespeare adapted and appropriated the sources to suit his needs. *Macbeth* became thus a timely celebration of lawful monarchy and a condemnation of regicide and conspiracy against the State in the aftermath of the Gunpowder Plot, with the playwright wisely screening James-I's reputed ancestor, Banquo, from any dishonourable intent. There is nothing essentially new in this. Theatre is, by its very nature, ephemeral, and consequently, even subsequent productions of the same play over the years generally "shift their emphasis in reflecting the hopes, fears, anger and current concerns of the societies from which these productions spring"

(Davies, 3).

But with regard to cinema, of course, the issue is quite different. This is partly because the political-moral position of a film becomes a fixture, establishing itself as another kind of text. Like theatre, it embodies impulses and emphases relevant to the time of its production; but unlike theatre, it is incapable of shedding them to adopt a new, perhaps more fashionable or contemporary, set of political-moral affiliations. The filmmaker may be seen, therefore, as having a greater responsibility than the theatrical director since:

Not only will his work reach a wider audience, and probably an audience which is less able to set a presentation of a play in context, but the nature of the cinematic medium will give the presentation an authority which is alien to the theatre.

(Davies, 3-4)

It is in this context that cross-cultural adaptations assume a paramount importance since they carry the onus of explaining the relevance of the text as it applies to the contemporary world situation, while remaining rooted in an indigenous influence. “Vaulting ambition, which o’erleaps itself” (*Macbeth*, I, vii, 27) is no longer an individual’s *hamartia*, it is a tragic flaw deep seated in the moral order. Corruption, betrayal, and lust for power have become a moral disease embedded in the decaying feudal order. By virtue of his extension of the violence of aspiration (in *Macbeth*) into the violence of reckless greed for material acquisition (in the film), Kurosawa achieves a bridging of at least four temporal dimensions. The original play, written in early seventeenth century, was based on the historical events of twelfth century Scotland. Kurosawa reinterprets the story by interpellating the characters into fourteenth century Japan while allegorizing it in terms of twentieth century scenario, bombarded by two World Wars separated by two decades, the last of which saw Japan reduced to rubble. *Throne of Blood*, therefore, became the aesthetic analogical index for the unprecedented level of violent bloodlust registered by the warring countries through genocide, mass extermination and nuclear devastation.

Throne of Blood: A Case in Point

In 1957, Kurosawa filmed not one but two adaptations- *Throne of Blood* from Shakespeare, and *Lower Depths* from Maxim Gorki—both exuding violence, but differing in the treatment of it. *Lower Depths* depicts a large dormitory where a group of vagrants reside, sleeping in narrow, two-tiered bunks while the camera moves through that given space (which, in a way, is one of the basic postulates of Naturalism), defining its own locus out of which the characters grow. It reeks of violence in the end—what looks like sheer documentation of a life of daily hardships is shattered by a suicide- the ultimate act of violence as a rejection of this condition of life. Violence in this film is a kind of release- a liberation from the degrading existential condition.

However, in *Throne of Blood*, a universally acclaimed film, Kurosawa’s vision shifts to a world where violence is almost epistemic in nature and springs no last-minute surprises, having placed the period-piece (*jidaigeki*)

in the tumultuous epoch of the *Sengoku jidai*- the ‘age of the Country at War’ (corresponding to 1392-1568 in the Western chronology). It was a period of civil wars roughly equivalent to the War of the Roses, when the Meiji dynasty was overthrown by the Bakufu, who ruled till 1868. During Bakufu supremacy, a warrior class called the *Samurai* emerged. *Samurai*, derived from the word *sabarau*, meaning ‘to serve’, has an ironic implication in the film since the class is represented as more self-serving than being loyal protectors of the ruler. The *Samurai* were also a doomed class, disbanded along with the *Shogunates* in the nineteenth century when the Meiji dynasty regained power. This historical fact works out in alliance with the knowledge that whatever action the hero chooses, his whole lifestyle is fundamentally doomed to destruction from the very outset. The film is offset then, so to speak, against a mythical matrix of violence.

Directing the film barely after a decade of the nuclear attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki on August 6 and August 9, 1945, Kurosawa remained preoccupied with the idea that violence begot violence. Says Satyajit Ray:

He seems, for instance, to have a preference for simple, universal situations over narrowly regional ones: the fear of nuclear destruction, graft in high places, the dehumanizing effect of bureaucracy, simple conflicts of good and evil, the moral allegory...and so on.

(Ray, 156)

Thus, the Lord of the Spider’s Web Castle, who had murdered his own master (ostensibly) in self defence, was killed by Washizu (the character equivalent to Macbeth), who in turn was killed by his mutinous soldiers. The film’s monochromatic reduction of colour, in sharp contrast to the theatrical splendour of any Shakespearean stage, enhances the gloom of the entire ambience rather than colliding with the essence of the text. As Rudolph Arnheim explains:

The reduction of all colours to black and white, which does not leave even their brightness value untouched...very considerably modifies the picture of the real world. Yet everyone

who goes to see the film accepts the screen world as being true to nature...the spectator experiences no shock at finding a world in which the sky is the same colour as the human face; he accepts shades of grey as red, white and blue of the flag; black lips as red...the leaves on a tree as dark as a woman's mouth... in the process all colour values have changed their relation to one another; similarities present themselves which do not exist in the natural world...

(Arnheim, 15)

The powerful inner force of Shakespeare's tragedy, therefore, acquires ventilation when converted into a two-dimensional cinematic shadow play, closer than most would allow, to the Expressionist aesthetic of the 'chiaroscuro' effect which inflicts 'violence' on habitual visual and perceptive mechanisms. It also evokes an unprecedented eeriness in certain scenes, such as in the representation of the ghostly white forest-witch, and more so in the sequence equivalent to the 'sleepwalking scene', where the darkened lips of Asaji (Lady Macbeth) instantly evokes the darkened patches of blood in the 'forbidden room' in which Fujimaki (the treacherous Thane of Cawdor) had committed suicide. Her mouth looks like it is spouting blood to compensate for the imaginary blood that she is trying to wash off her hands— an uncanny reminder of the blood that has been shed on their way to the crown.

In adapting Shakespeare's dramatic material to the screen, Kurosawa compensates for the changed relationship between what is spoken and what is shown by relinquishing Shakespearean verse and thus remaining faithful to a precept intrinsic to the cinematic medium. Remarks Satyajit Ray:

...in his adaptation of *Macbeth*, Kurosawa forsakes verbal poetry for the poetry of action. One suspects he could do this because, not knowing English, he was able to escape the spell of Shakespeare's poetry which has either inhibited all film versions of Shakespeare in English, or else brought forth bastard versions which make vain attempts to be faithful both to the bard and to the demands of the film medium.

(Ray, 184)

Instead, he employs “visual rhymes, that is, repetitions and parallels, like the rhymes of verse” (Kliman, 184) to bind and flow the narrative while they deepen meanings. Since the film eschews verbal priority and consequently dispenses with all but the most essential dialogue to carry forward the narrative, the spectators wholly rely on the manipulation of spatial detail within the rectangular frame of the screen for the subtleties which go beyond the information of the story via movement, gesture, facial expression, *mise-en-scene*, and the reinforcement given to these by non-verbal sound.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the sequence where Washizu and Miki (Banquo), returning triumphant from the war with the Innui, get trapped in the Cobweb Forest leading to their eventual encounter with the ‘evil spirit’. Although the sequence, lasting for fifteen minutes and twenty-five seconds, is understood to be taking place within the Cobweb Forest, it can notwithstanding be divided, depending upon its sub-locational variation, into four scenes—the first in which they are lost in the forest proper; second taking place in the witch’s hut; third in the outskirts of the forest while they try to find their way out of the dense fog; the fourth in the meadows lying between the forest and the Spider’s Web Castle. The first scene consists of 39 shots, with the two characters remaining trapped in the dense forest for a screen time of four minutes. Torrential rain and thunder set an apocalyptic ambience, with lightning momentarily illuminating the darkness pervading the primitive space. In the expansion of Birnam ‘Wood’ into a ‘forest’ which assumes the dramatic stature of a character, it is rendered into a projection of psychological space where the dynamic flow of spectacularity in the cinematic language opens up a maze of unconfined spaces.

Dramatic tension is fashioned through conflicts. Washizu’s military triumph is in opposition to his helpless disorientation while he tries to claw his way out of the forest in mounting panic. Visual conflict is generated between the domination of *vertical* lengths of hanging roots, resembling suspended reptilian creatures, and the *horizontal* paths which are followed by the two warriors. From their conversations, we come to know that the forest holds a “strategic importance in the war-torn situation of the realm” (Davies, 156) as it is a maze of deceptive trails

in which an invading army will lose its bearings and its morale. Ironically, it is they who, in spite of knowing the secret passages through the forest, lose their integrity and cohesive moral unity in its impenetrable labyrinth. This governing metaphor of entrapment is recurrent throughout the film; it anticipates the trapping of Washizu in the ‘web’ of his own ambition when, later, he is “locked in the rigid geometry of rectilinear interior design and low ceilings [in his house] that leave him no alternative other than to cower in the corner” (Guntner, 126) and the final, lethal trapping of Washizu by a volley of arrows. It is also, significantly, the first of Washizu’s three encounters with the forest- he “visits the forest twice, and then through a dramatic reversal, the forest visits him with devastating finality” (Davies, 156). Washizu and Miki exhibit, however, a sturdy martial confidence as the tracking camera follows them as they blaze through the forest trails, in defiance of the uncanny laughter of the ‘evil spirit’ that mockingly pursues them. The scene has been, to that effect, edited quite rapidly, to be consistent with the nervous energy exuded by its characters, with shots often mediated by the lightning effect.

The 40th shot leads us to the second scene, consisting of 30 shots, which takes place in a clearing within the forest where they come across a thatch inhabited by the spirit. The soundtrack pre-empts the actual visual manifestation of the spirit, a mesmeric chant drawing them into its irresistible fold. From a long shot of the hut, the camera cuts back to the two men who dismount, and following the source of the sound, arrive at a point from where they can view the hut in a skewed angle. The camera trails behind till they stop, then continues “till it shows the spirit in medium shot, white, utterly other, spinning thread from one reel to another as it sings” (Forsyth, 286). Its song underscores the theme of ambition and its foul derivative, violence:

Men are vain and death is long
And pride dies first within the grave.
For hair and nail are growing still
When face and fame are gone
Nothing in this world will save

Or measure up man's actions here
Nor in the next, for there is none...
Only evil can maintain an afterlife for those...
To whom ambition calls.
Even so, this false fame falls.
Death will reign, man dies in vain.

(quoted from the subtitle of the film, *Kumonosu-djo*)

Reaction shots show the “two men transfixed, peering through the undergrowth and into the white-lit scene” (Forsyth, 288). Finally, they move sideways and the camera comes in around behind them till it occupies their point of view, showing the full scene framed by the two warriors—light framed within the dark forest, a film within a film where:

The two warriors quickly become spectators of a magic show, frontally presented as in the Méliès films, rather than a constantly shifting viewing position in what became the classical style, to absorb the spectator into the film space... Japanese legends about androgynous seers make Kurosawa's witch-substitute exactly right for the world of the film...there on screen is this unutterably strange spirit...mesmerising us as we watch the thread cross from reel to reel. Unmistakably this is Destiny, and indeed the thread is near its end already. But even more clearly...the spinning reels also refer to the magic art of film itself.

(Forsyth, 288)

At the narrative level, the spirit represents a ‘violence’ of the natural order, and her song the ‘violence’ of a moral order undertaken by proud and ambitious men, whose pursuit of fame and power lead to their inevitable destruction, which is in direct correlation with Japan's downfall in the Second World War, having forged an alliance with the power-craving fascist policies of Mussolini and Hitler. The notion of violence is therefore manifested not only as visceral, but implicit; moral and not merely corporal. On the other hand, the spinning spools of thread signify the trapping of Washizu in a deadly ‘web’ of fate. The criss-crossed

structure of the witch's hut is recaptured in the patterned cage-like screen that frames Washizu in the 'forbidden room', where he sat before going out to murder the king. To that effect, *Throne of Blood*, unlike *Macbeth*, does not remain a drama about the power of choice but about the inevitability of prophetic truth, and hence accurately titled *The Castle of the Spider's Web*.

At the end of the scene, the spirit disappears with a gust of wind, as if 'magicked' away, and Washizu and Miki step forward to inhabit the space vacated by the figure, to indicate that they have crossed over into the realm of the unreal. The scene ends with the exit of the two characters followed by a deliberate slow-focusing on a mound of skulls²- a static, singular image projected into sharp relief by detaching it from the following and preceding shots that over-activate space and time. The next shot is a close-up of the same mound-this time military hardware (like helmets and spears) clearly visible along with the skulls. The neatly constructed mound of skulls does not seem to belong to the space of the Cobweb Forest- it belongs to the future, to the innumerable mounds in the world captured by Alain Renais in *Night and Fog* (1956), a world that carries the legacy of violence of the Second World War and the Holocaust it entailed. Therefore, violence, though captured in a mythopoetic construct, allegorically pertains also to the recent devastation of Japan.

The third scene, composed of 9 shots and lasting two-and-half minutes, shows the two men lost again in the outskirts, groping about in the mist. The prophecies spelt out by the spirit are already at work, deviously clouding their rational faculties, as the fog signifies. Fog, mist, dust from the hoofs of horses play throughout as a leit-motif, symbolising the self-deception men practise to shield themselves from truth. The fourth and final scene, with three rather longish takes, shows Toshiro Mifune (playing Washizu) and Miki coming out of the mist to rest on the heath. The characters are significantly placed at the extreme ends of the frame, with the Castle visible in a distance between them, both foreground and background in focus- the ambition to own the Castle is already nestling between the two friends. The tension within Washizu is reflected in the lines of his body that stress the conflict of the diagonal

(flag and arrows) with the horizontal (patterns in his armour and the ground). The easy laughter of the friends at the outrageous prophecies evaporates as they consider the possibility of their eventual fulfilment—the spectators know that their relation will never be the same again. Physically, they have come out of the labyrinthine forest paths, but psychologically, they still inhabit its dark, ominous recesses.

The organic correspondence between the forest and the Castle are made emphatically clear when, on the eve of battle, the birds from the demolished trees of the forest invade the Castle as they “link wood with wood: and their haphazard intrusion juxtaposes the unregimented world of nature with the mathematically restrained world of man” (Davies, 157). When the trees move through the mist towards the Castle, they are photographed in slow motion, bestowing them with an ominous fluidity of movement. Apart from the Forest, Kurosawa also uses horses and banners to signify the approach of death. Miki’s death is never shown, but is understood from the return of his horse with an empty saddle, unlike in Shakespeare where the scene had been incorporated. Curiously enough though, in an unexpected display of fidelity, dramatic peaks in the play are consistently reflected in the film. The arrival of Duncan at Inverness, the dramatic tension created before Macbeth’s murdering of Duncan, his confrontation with Banquo’s ghost, Lady Macbeth trying to wash off blood from her hands, the Forest moving to Dunsinane are developed with the same structural force in the film. Kurosawa’s genius lies not in altering climactic moments, but in interpolating them in a specific cultural locus which is bolstered by his consistent use of the Noh theatrical tradition of Japan. Stephen Prince quotes Kurosawa as saying:

I showed each of the players a photograph of the mask of the Noh which came closest to the respective role; I told him that the mask was his own part. To Toshiro Mifune...I showed the mask of a warrior...To Asaji, I showed the mask named Shakumi. This was the mask of a beauty no longer young, and represented the image of a woman about to go mad.

(quoted in Prince, 146)

David Desser explains that the Noh theatre, begun around twelfth century, is a “highly esoteric presentational form which relies on dance, music, masks and declamatory narrative to relate traditional folktales...In Noh, one decodes the gestures, the masks, the music, and not the narrative being related” (Desser, 39). Kurosawa is therefore able to reconcile an unbridgeable division, even opposition, between the theatrical and the cinematic, each medium being defined by its own standards of judgment and canons of form, which are not only distinct but often antithetical. It has been a special concern of the cinematic medium to shake itself free from the impurities of theatricality. Much as a self-conscious teenager is anxious to evade adult intrusion into his or her private world, cinema, as a relatively adolescent art, is forever at pains to emphasize its independence from the authority of a millennia-old ancestor. By incorporating Noh stylistics in the film, Kurosawa confounds the separatist tendencies of each art form, appropriating and assimilating them to set off the other’s characteristics.

Noh characters are largely embodiments of internal traits and desires as the rigidly conventionalized movements and vocalization of Asaji shows. Her characterization within Noh conventions reflects her own limitation, as the fixed expression of the Noh mask that her face is made-up into is indicative of her refusal to be anything more than what she already is. Donald Richie maintains that following the choreographic discipline of Noh, she “moves heel to toe as does the Noh actor” (Richie, 117) so that she glides across the screen as a unified presence, totally committed to ambition, having embodied violence in a floating, amorphous, surreal way. In Shakespeare, Lady Macbeth thinks one murder is enough, while Asaji (played by Isuzu Yamada), pregnant with the hope of an heir, instigates Miki and his son’s murder. Later, her stillborn child provides a potent motive for her descent into insanity.

Neil Forsyth declares that Kurosawa had “his own clear cultural sense of how a ghost will appear and how others will react” (Forsyth, 279) as he invents a film language to depict the chalk-white ghost of Miki, frightening in its cold passivity and iciness. Moreover, the Noh stylization of the banquet scene builds around a collision between intentional and unintentional theatre—Washizu commands the Noh dance

performer to halt as he is irked by the subject of his performance (it is about a man who tries vainly to evade self-destructive retribution), but on seeing the ghost of Miki, he launches himself into a frantic, dance-like movement, brandishing his sword. Kurosawa is thus able to both intensify and aestheticize the violence incipient in the scene by taking recourse to a culturally codified signification. On the other hand, he desists from appropriating theatrical tropes indiscriminately, avoiding the farcical piece of the ‘Porter scene’ which could have easily diluted the taut narrative strands so painstakingly constructed. Moreover, Kurosawa was quick to realise that such a scene, tailor-made for the Elizabethan theatre, would never have the same dramatic effect in the absence of the requisite stage mechanisms essential for its execution.

The film is also devoid of a single soliloquy, as if Washizu’s thoughts could have no equivalent words. After his wife’s miscarriage, (in a brilliant performance) Toshiro Mifune sits immobile in his room, suddenly barking out repeatedly a single word—“fool”—realising what an imbecile he had been to challenge the dictates of destiny. Occupying the frame with his seated figure are two other objects—the throne and his sword—his ambition and the cruel means of its achievement. Ironically, their relationship had hitherto seemed almost divested of any sexual element since Washizu never visibly touches his wife before her insanity sets in, as if perpetually in fear of receiving the contagion of her relentless ambition.

Unlike in Shakespeare, there is an absence of the higher moral order with the reduced emphasis on Kunimaru (Malcolm) and Noriyasu (Macduff). With no totally noble creatures, there can be no ritual act of purification of the evil by the good. It is a tragedy without heroism—Washizu’s spectacular human pincushion death is not an individual feat accomplished by Noriyasu. It is rather done by soldiers who had hitherto supported him, but, sensing danger, have now turned against him, much as Mussolini had been captured and executed by Italian Partisans. In the overthrow of an autocrat who had already driven three commanders to suicide and murdered one, the film celebrates democracy rather than egalitarianism, as the nameless minions of feudalism act in concerted rebellion, robbing Washizu of his last vestiges of warrior dignity.

The moral thrust that was spelt out in the choric song at the commencement of the film, following the Benshi culture of interpreting a story, where the voices speak of “a proud warrior/ Murdered by ambition/ A strong man/ Made weak by a woman” (quoted in Davies, 158), is reiterated in the end. The film is bracketed off by the same ritualized chanting that inaugurated it, delivering a warning for the future. The cautionary statement insists that the spirit of Washizu still survives in the contemporary world, the ‘murderous aspiration’ he fell prey to being liable to rake in more victims. There is no escape once the heart is tempted by the desire to possess more than it deserves, and as there may be no limit to human aspiration, it is essential to delimit one’s actions. If there is no peace in life, there will be no peace in death:

Still his spirit walks,
His fame is known;
For what once was, so now still true-
Murderous ambition will pursue
Beyond the grave to give its due.

(quoted from the subtitles of the film, *Kumonosu-djo*)

Conclusion: Making, Unmaking and Remaking

Michael Anderegg argues that “as an ‘art cinema’ artefact, *Throne of Blood* received extensive cultural support; it was embraced by Shakespeareans in part because its translation into another medium was so complete that comparisons could be made in general rather than specific terms” (Anderegg, 163). The film’s strength lies in the fact that it has evolved a film language appropriate to the interpretative effort it engages in, while simultaneously incorporating and accommodating contemporary geo-political concerns within its domain. *Throne of Blood* is something new, fashioned out of the bones of something old, which confirms “the existence of an art form, western in origin, but transplanted and taking root in a new soil” (Ray, 156). The film, separated from the play by a considerable chronotopic chasm, represents an alternate, equally valid, interpretation and understanding of Shakespeare. It explicates and uncovers a phenomenon that highlights the hitherto undiscovered dimensions of Shakespeare, and enriches our perception of his

palimpsestic texts. On the other hand, it has rendered him more accessible and open to radical application of ideas. Most importantly, however, it becomes imperative to our acknowledgement of films and Shakespeare not as exclusive or mutually unproductive ontological categories, as Russell Jackson elaborates:

It is probably as much of a mistake to ask whether ‘film’ can do justice to ‘Shakespeare’ as to reproach ‘Shakespeare’ with being inappropriate material for ‘films’. Neither are stable entities, reducible to simple sets of definitions, but two bundles of techniques and opportunities that may be mixed together with more or less enjoyable and impressive results.

(Jackson, 9)

It is a relief to know that the master appropriator may himself be appropriated to suit certain artistic purposes, for a change. One wonders, not without a hint of amusement perhaps, whether Mr. Shakespeare would have relished a taste of his own medicine.

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Footnotes

1. For a complete list of Shakespeare's sources for *Macbeth*, see Kenneth Muir's 'Introduction' to the Arden Edition of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Ed. Kenneth Muir .U.K.: Thomas Nelson and Company, 2003.
2. The mound of skulls recurs in the woodcuts and ethnographs by Otto Dix in post-World War-I Germany. One of his woodcuts shows a man having lunch with numerous skulls strewn carelessly around him.

Madhusudan Dutta (25 January 1824 - 29 June 1873) on the Bengali Stage

Mousumi Singha and Mithun Datta

Abstract

Madhusudan Dutta is known as a poet of the 19th century in Bengali literature. Just as he stirred up the world of poetry, he also awakened Bengali theatre with new ideas. Although his encounter with the world of theatre was in a particularly dramatic way. At that time, Babu Theatre and other theatres were waiting for him to change the direction of the theatre. Madhusudan Dutta came and changed the flow of the one-way reformed trend of Bengali theatre. He created indigenous ideas in theatre by writing plays. He was able to present the role of theatre in the awakening of women in front of the audience. He created a different dimension in the stage scenery. In this way, his role in the trend of Bengali theatre is highlighted here.

Keywords: Theatre, Bengali stage, acting, drama, play, actress, actors.

Introduction:

Madhusudan Dutta's (25 January 1824 - 29 June 1873) stage of life is only fifteen years. From June¹, 1858, to June 30, 1873 (death), his relationship with the theatre has become history. Here he had good relations with the patrons of various Sakher Theatres, Bengal Theatre and National Theatre, relations with actors, being involved in the advisory committees of various theatres etc. Makes him stage-oriented. Patrons of the stage also play an important role in inspiring his various creations.² Needless to say, Madhusudan Dutta's talent blossomed through the stage.

The Beginning of the Relationship with Bengali Theatre:

Madhusudan had just returned to Calcutta from Madras. At that time, Madhusudan Dutta's friend Gaurdas Basak was a member of the theatre society of 'Belgachia Natyashala' (July 31, 1858-March 29, 1961).³ He was the secretary of an organization called Our Own Club. Later this institution became Belgachia Natyashala. Here, on the day when RamnarayanTarkaratna's 'Ratnavali', the translator of Sriharsha's Sanskrit 'Ratnavali', will be performed for the third time at night, English officials including Frederick James Halliday (25th December 1806 - 22nd October 1901), the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal will be present and Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, Rajendralal Mitra, Keshava Chandra Sen and others will be among the Bengali audience. As the audience would not be able to understand this Bengali play, Madhusudan Dutta was asked to translate 'Ratnavali' into English at the request of Gaurdas Basak. It was through Gaurdas Basak that Madhusudan Dutta first met with theatre. It was there that he met Pratap Chandra Singh, the eldest king of Belgachia theatre. After the translation of 'Ratnavali', his friend and manager of Paikpara Rajas Shriram Chattopadhyay praised him.⁴ He was paid five hundred rupees for this translation work. These two royal brothers were very fond of Madhusudan. Madhusudan Dutta had a substantial role behind what Gaurdas Basak described in the play 'Ratnavali' as a well-decorated stage, romantic scenery, harmonious music, stunning costumes, precious staging and overall smooth acting. Gaurdas also mentions how beautiful the scene of the moon rising behind Kadalikunj was. Madhusudan has always been an unreformed revolutionary in acting. From the very first performance of 'Ratnavali', she strongly advocated the casting of a female actress as a wife in the style of English theatre. Because if men play the role of wife, that performance becomes very artificial. Therefore, he thinks that the Bengali stage should be free from reform.⁵ Incidentally, one day when Madhusudan came to see the practice of 'Ratnavali', he said to Gaurdas, 'Look, what a pity that the kings are spending so much money for this one insignificant play.' Gaurdas said where is the good play in Bengal? Then Madhusudan said - 'Good play? Well, I will compose.'⁶ Even Madhusudan expressed his displeasure with the play to the kings. After

the first performance of ‘Ratnavali’, everyone joked with him and asked him to write ‘Vidyasundar’ after hearing about Madhusudan’s English translation for the English. This joke increases his stubbornness. As a result, Madhusudan, who wrote English poetry like ‘Captive Lady’ and ‘Visions of the Past’, returned to writing plays in his mother tongue Bengali. This man once wrote in Bengali ‘Prothibee’ while writing ‘Prithibee’. When he borrowed a few books on Gaurdas Basak from the Asiatic Society in Bengali and English and within a week or two read out the first few scenes of ‘Sharmishtha’ to his friend Gaurdas Basak, he was amazed at his friend’s feat. A few days later when he finished writing the play ‘Sharmishtha’ he showed the manuscript to Ishwar Chandra Singh, Pratap Chandra Singh and Jatindramohan Tagore. He even dedicated the play to these two kings of Belgachia. They were the main inspirations for his stage and drama.⁷ Yogindranath Basu points out that King Ishwar Chandra had a strong passion for the revival of indigenous drama, as evidenced by Madhusudan Dutta’s letter to Gaurdas, written during the Belgachia theatre period—“I am astonished at your conduct. You are the friend who is determined to put me to shame, not only before the Amateur Company, with which we have identified ourselves, but before the audience that we expect on the night of the performance....Now be plain once and for all, and tell me that you will not absent yourself again....” His ‘Sharmishtha’ was first performed in Belgachia on 3 September 1859, third on 21 September, and sixth on 27 September.

Relationship and Contribution to Bengali Theatre:

He even used the idea of direct experience of the stage in the form of playwriting. The stage idea of the play ‘Sharmishtha’ can be understood in the first scene of the first act. He brought the style of presentation of Sanskrit and Western dramas of the stage to Bengali drama. He planned to incarnate the scene. He used the name ‘Garbhanka’ in place of the scene. The first scene of the play is—Himalayan Mountains and Amaravati. Madhusudan used to draw this scene in such a way that the audience would go crazy. In the writing of Raja Ishwar Chandra Singh to Gaurdas Basak for the play ‘Sharmishtha’ - ‘No less than eighth scenes are to be newly painted’. It was known, ‘most of them are

already finished, and beautiful, and magnificent they are without doubt.' The scenery was painted in Navin Bose's house like the scene of Madhusudan's play. This scene was important in the evolution of Belgachia theatre. Later in the play 'Krishna Kumari' (1861) scenes like palace, Antahpura, Raj Udyan, Eklinger temple etc. are mentioned. However, in the third scene of the fourth act the playwright as per instructions the stage is two-storeyed. Because on the same stage are Vilaswati and Madnika on the Gabalakshpath of Jaipur temple and 'below' the minister and the poor Dhandasa. Vilaswati and Madnika hear them. But Dhandas and the minister do not hear them. But later it is not known whether this play was performed in Sobhabazar Theatre (8th February 1867) or Jorasanko Thakurbari.⁸

He chose the story of Devyani and Sharmishtha's attraction to a man as the self-indulgent and polygamous scene of the contemporary love theatre would be interesting for the play 'Sharmishtha'.⁹ Madhusudan's achievements in theatre include smooth scenery, acting according to the nature of the play, music, grand entrance of all, etc.¹⁰ On the day of the first performance of the night in Belgachia on 3rd September 1859, Lieutenant Governor of Bengal Sir Joun Peter Grant (28 November 1807 – 6 January 1893), Vidyasagar, Rajendralal Mitra were also present. Even Madhusudan Dutta himself was regularly present during the rehearsals before the performance and during the performance.¹¹

Officials of Belgachia Theatre were like family in Madhusudan. The third performance of 'Sharmishtha' was performed here on September 21, 1859; on Wednesday Raja Pratap Chandra Singh was present in the performance that day. He was highly appreciative of the dialogues, music, music and acting of the play. Madhusudan's initiative was the first to introduce Local Unity for this Belgachia theatre. Kshetramohan Goswami and Jadunath Paul formed the team for him. Jatindramohan Tagore was the music director.¹² Lieutenant Governor Grant Saheb, Munshi Ameer Ali of Patna and others came to see the performance of 'Sharmishtha'. This play was performed six times on September 27. The name of Madhusudan Dutta in this performance and the name of actor Keshav Chandra Gangopadhyay in the role of Madhavya became popular in Kolkata. Madhusudan respected him for his profound

knowledge of acting. He used to take his advice even in composing plays. He was called the Garrick of Bengal for his outstanding acting. Madhusudan said to him for that reason— “O thou avatar of the Roman Roscius and the English Garrick.”¹³ Encouraged by the success of ‘Sharmishtha’, Madhusudan wrote another play on historical subjects called ‘Padmavati’ in 1860. He thought that the Muslim character of history was particularly heroic. Scenes from the epic drama ‘Rizia Empress of the Indies’ were published in the Eurasian magazine between 10 November and 12 January 1849. But after returning to Calcutta, Keshav Chandra Gangopadhyay discouraged him from doing so. As a result, a full play was not written on ‘Rizia’.

However, when Ishwarchandra Singh died on 29 March 1861, ‘Ekei Ki Bale Savyata?’, written for Belgachia, (1861) and ‘Buro Shaliker Ghare Ronh’ (1861) farces were not performed. However, both dramas are written according to the stage. In that case, he used Western and Eastern stage ideas in the play. ‘Ekei Ki Bale Savyata?’ in the second scene of the first act of the drama Babaji listens to the dialogues of the front characters from ‘the end located’ and after their exit comes to the front of the stage and expresses his speech. Like Shakespeare’s ‘Retire’ or ‘Stand Aside’, Madhusudan Dutta expresses this idea on stage. After ‘Kirtilata’ (1852) he brought the scene of murder and suicide to inevitable causes. But he omitted Nandipath, not-sutradhara. This play made him more aware of the stage. By dividing the scenes, the five acts maintained the unity of space numerically in the play. Unfortunately, two of his farces were not performed on this stage. After the death (March 29, 1861) of Ishwar Chandra Singh, the owner of the Belgachia Theatre and the promoter of the theatre, his play ‘Krishna Kumari’ was also not performed on this stage. Theatre formed the prelude to Madhusudan Dutta’s literary career.¹⁴

After Belgachiya, good relations were formed with Madhusudan with three more theatres. For example, Pathuriaghata Theatre (1859-1873), Shobhabazar Private Theatrical Society (1865-1867), Jorasanko Theatre (1865-1877). In context; Jatindramohan Tagore’s younger brother Shaurindramohan Tagore was the supervisor of this theatre. An executive committee of this theatre was formed. One of the members of this

committee was Michael Madhusudan Dutta. There were also Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Keshav Chandra Gangopadhyay, Dinanath Ghosh and others. This committee used to decide who would be dressed on the theatre stage, whose and which play would be performed.¹⁵ Shaurindramohan Tagore requested Jatindramohan Tagore in a letter to translate the play 'Malvikagnimitra' to Madhusudan. Jatindramohan Tagore was one of the leaders of the cultural movement of the 19th century. That person wrote to Madhusudan Dutta, "I believe, Rajas (Paikpara) will not perform any Bengali plays in Belgachia Theater again. And if you ask about my brother's theatre, I am afraid that the performance of 'Malbika' will be the first and last performance of this theatre. (Translated) The play 'Malvikagnimitra' was performed for the second time. The date of this performance is 7th July 1860."¹⁶ After that the play was performed on that stage.

It is noteworthy that Madhusudan Dutta's relationship with dramatist Keshav Chandra Gangopadhyay was very sweet. It was at his request that Madhusudan was given Tod's history of Rajasthan as 'Krishna Kumari'; Wrote plays. He dedicated the play to him and the dedication letter was written 'Adhunik Bangadeshiya Nat-Kulshiromani'. But when the performance was delayed, later Jatindramohan Tagore bore the cost of printing the play 'Krishna Kumari'. Madhusudan Dutta wrote to Keshav Gangopadhyay, "As an insignificant member of Belgachia Theatre, I am doing my best to increase the glory of this theatre. If the other members are still slacking off, then it is not my fault. I can say in the name of God, even if there is nothing else in this play, it has unlimited possibilities of acting."¹⁷ Because in the ancient Hindu house, the tradition of performing tragic dramas like skilled sacrifices is against. However, even though Madhusudan's play was not performed on this stage, he had a role in acting and directing the plays of others. On 7 July 1860, Keshav Chandra Gangopadhyay and Shorindramohana Tagore played the role of Vidushaka, Kanchuki in the second act of the play 'Malabkagnimitra'. Acting was also fixed by Madhusudan. Actor Vidyasagar was very much involved with this theatre. With his encouragement, 'Vidyasundar' (first performance, 3rd December 1865, dramatized by Jatindramohan Tagore), Ramnarayan Tarkaratna's 'Jeman

Karma Teman Phal' (performed 30th December 1865), Jatindramohan's A farce was performed under the name 'Bujhle Ki Na' (December 15, 1866)¹⁸. Madhusudan Dutta himself considered those who acted in the play 'Vidyasunder' on 3 December 1865. It can be seen that in this drama, Radhaprasad Basak played the role of Raja Bir Singh, Madanmohan Barman played the role of Vidya, Mahendranath Mukhopadhyay played the role of Sundar, Krishnadhan Bandyopadhyay played the role of Hira. Keshav Gangopadhyay, the principal of Belgachiya, was the drama teacher of the play 'Vidyasunder'. Due to this association, the unity instrument which was used in the Belgachia Natyammancha is also used here. Madhusudan was present as a prominent audience on the day of the performance of 'Bujhle Ki Na'. This association was fixed for such farce performances. The custom of using native unity can be observed in this stage. The scene, songs and actors of the play were fixed by others like Madhusudan. Radhaprasad Basak, Harimohan Karmakar, Girish Chandra Chattopadhyay, Mahendranath Mukhopadhyay, Haricharan Bandyopadhyay, Madanmohan Burman and Krishnadhan Bandyopadhyay played the roles of King, Minister, Ganga (Bhat), Sundar, Dhumketu, Vidya, Heere (Malini) etc. After this Bhavabhuti's 'Malatimadhava' was translated into Bengali and Mahendranath Mukhopadhyay played the role of 'Madhava'. Madhusudan Dutta was with Jatindramohan Tagore when he was going to get undressed at the end of the performance. Madhusudan Dutta told Mahendranath Mukhopadhyay when he went to summon Lord Saheb that it should not be wrong to say Lord Saheb as My Lord. Unable to understand the plays 'Rukminiharan' (February 25, 1873) and 'Ubhay Sankat' at the Pathuriaghata Theatre, Madhusudan wrote their summaries for Lord Northbrook, the royal representative.¹⁹

However, the first performance of Sobhabazar Private Theatrical Society (1865-1867) was Madhusudan Dutta's farce 'Ekei Ki Bale Savyata?' (July 18, 1865). Due to social barriers, the two plays were not performed. Four years after that in 1865, his 'Ekei Ki Bale Sabvyata' was performed under the initiative of Sobhabazar Theatrical Society. There Nab Babu's sleeping house was very beautiful on the stage. Although Madhusudan was not in Calcutta at that time. However, Digambara Mitra, Kaliprasanna Singh, and Jatindramohan Tagore were

present at the venue. All of them highly appreciated drama. This Kaliprasanna Singh²⁰ was a literary encourager of Calcutta at that time. He was the founder of Vidyotsahini Rangamanch (April 11, 1856). On February 12, 1861, when Madhusudhan Dutta's poem 'Meghnad Badh' was published, he held a big meeting in the courtyard of Jorasanko's house to welcome him. As gifts, he was given a congratulatory letter written in Bengali and a silver cup. This was the first public literary tribute in Bengal. ²¹ When 'Neeldarpan' was published in 1860, it was translated into English by Madhusudan Dutta. That translation was highly praised by then High Court judge Sir Mordont Wells and 'Friends of India's editor Marshman Sahib. Although the English translation of 'Neeldarpan' was published under Reverend Long's name. However, Kaliprasanna Singh removed himself as the president of the executive committee of this theatre but on 8th February 1867, Madhusudan Dutta's play 'Krishna Kumari' was performed. Biharilal Chattopadhyay, the leading actor in this theatre, was his fan. He acted in the role of Bhim Singh in the drama 'Krishna Kumari'. Even Jorashanko theatre founder Sarada Prasad Gangopadhyay, Gunendranath Tagore and Jyotirindranath Tagore for the first performance of this theatre 'Krishna Kumari' and a few days later 'Ekei Ki Bale Sabvyata?' acted

And Madhusudan was present in the first-night performance of 'Krishna Kumari' (22nd February 1873) at the National Theatre (1872). Notable among the founders of this theatre were Kshetramohan Gangopadhyay, Amritlal Bose; Madhusudan hit hard in their acting roles. He wanted to break the traditional reforms.²² Even the forerunner of the Renaissance Madhusudan was closely associated with nationalism. So before this performance, a drama called 'Bharatmata' is performed in front of the audience in the form of song and drama. Girish Ghosh's entry into the theatre world with his performance in this play. Girish Chandra Ghosh's role as 'Bhim Singh', Ardhendushekhhar Mustafi's role as 'Dhandas', Nagendranath Bandyopadhyay's role as Balendra Singh, and Amritlal Bose's role as Madnika was highly praised in the lap. He danced and said Krishnakumary you have done to perfection.²³ Amritlal Bose charged Harimohan Banerjee with a monthly salary of 40 rupees from the money earned for acting in the theatre. He was the first

salaried person on the stage.²⁴ On that year 8th march performed ‘Buro shaker KhareRonh’, ‘Krishna Kumari on 12 April, Krishna Kumari in Dhaka on 16 July (this performance was to help Madhusudan’s underprivileged children), ‘Sharmishta’ was performed at the Hindu National Theatre on 5 April 1873. Nagendranath Banerjee as Yayati, Ardhendushekhar Mustafi as Bakasu, Amritlal Mukhopadhyay as Devyani, Kshetramohan Gangopadhyay as Sharmishtha.

Then in 1873, Ashutosh Deb (Satubabu), a famous soundman of North Calcutta, founded the Douhitya Saratchandra Ghosh Bengal Theatre (1873-1901). This theatre was associated with Madhusudan Dutta from its inception (August 16, 1873) till his death (June 30, 1873). Madhusudan Dutta and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar Mahashay were among the mentors of this theatre. There were also Saratchandra Ghosh, Umesh Chandra Dutta Satyabrata Samashrami etc. When entrepreneurs approached Madhusudan for plays, he agreed to write plays. In that meeting, Madhusudan Dutta proposed that if men acted in women’s roles, it would not turn out to be a proper performance. Male actors playing female characters seemed very artificial and unusual to him. This idea first arose in Madhusudan’s mind. His idea was supported by Satyabrata Samashrami and Umesh Chandra Dutta.²⁵ According to his idea, Sarat Chandra Ghosh brought actresses from brothels to play the role of wife in Bengal theatre. In the history of Bengali drama literature, the actress is seen playing the role of the wife for the first time in this theatre. Madhusudan Dutta made his timeless debut.²⁶ Madhusudan Dutta added a new dimension to Bengali theatre and acting. After that, he also acted in ‘Durgesh Nandini’.²⁷ Although ‘Hindu Petiot’, ‘Englishman’, ‘Amrita Bazar Patrika’, ‘Samani’, and ‘Madhyastha’ newspapers strongly opposed the actors. Vidyasagar also opposed this opinion of Michael Madhusudan. After that Vidyasagar withdrew his support from this theatre. In this case, they brought the first four actresses. They are Golap Sundari, Elokeshi, Jagattarini and Shyama. It is noteworthy that on August 16, 1873, Bengal Theatre opened its doors with Michael Madhusudan’s play ‘Sharmishtha’. In it, Golap Sundari played the role of Sharmishtha, Elokeshi Devyani and Jagattarini played the role of Devika. Although Vidyasagar protested, Madhusudan’s relationship with the theatre

authorities was very close. He wrote two plays for this theatre named 'Mayakanan' and 'Bish Na Dhanurguna' at the request of the promoters. But he died before acting. A year later (1874) Madhusudan Dutta played the role of Golap Sundari in his dramas 'Mayakanan' and 'Krishna Kumari'.²⁸ 'Krishna Kumari' in Bengal Theater on 29 November 1873, 'Mayakanan' on 18 April, 'Krishna Kumari' on 9 May 1874, 'Padmavati' on 4th July, 'Krishna kumari' on 9th January 1875, 'Sharmishtha' on 23rd January 1875, 'Meghnadvadh'²⁹ on 6th March 1875 'Meghnadvadh' was performed on 13th March of that year. Before Madhusudan's death (1873), his plays as well as Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's adaptation of 'Durgeshanandini' were performed in Bengal theatre. Later, Madhusudan's plays and Bankim's 'Durgeshanandini' were performed several times in Bengal theatres.

Conclusion:

Despite not being a well-known name in the world of Bengali theatre, he brought about a tremendous change in Bengali theatre. He wanted to combine Western theatrical ideas with Bengali theatre culture. However, he did not exclude Indian culture from the theatre stage. Just as he brought about constructive improvements in theatre, he also wrote plays for theatre. He also taught character acting. The time limit for his play-writing was only four years, and his time in theatre was many times longer than his play-writing life. Therefore, the contribution of Bengali play-writer and stage director Madhusudan Dutta is undeniable.

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3. Ibid., p. 161.
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Chattopadhyay, West Bengal Natya Akademi, Department of Information and Culture Government of West Bengal, 1992, p. 70.

6. Bose, Yogindranath. *The Biography of Michael Madhusudan Dutta*. 5th ed., Dey's Publishing, 2018, p. 160.
7. Chaudhary, Darshan. *Bangla Theatrer Itihas*. p. 90. "Paying tribute to them, he wrote in the preface to the play 'Sharmishtha' - 'If there is a revival of drama in India, the people of the future will not forget these two noble men - they are the first encouragers of our emerging national theatre.'"
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10. Bose, Yogindranath. *Biography of Michael Madhusudan Dutta*. 5th ed., Dey's Publishing, 2018, p. 165.
11. Murshid, Ghulam. *Ashar Chhalane Buli*. 2nd ed., Ananda Publishers, Mar. 2003, p. 186.
12. Basu, Vishnu. *Babu Theatre*. Pratibhas, 15 Apr. 1986, p. 72.
13. Ghosh, Ajitkumar. *Drama and Theatre*. 4th ed., Dey's Publications, Apr. 2010, p. 55
14. "If there is ever to be a revival of drama in this country, it will be by English-educated men, who have shown the first evidence of it. The restoration of the national theater is a great event for national literature; We have given such a detailed account of Madhusudan's life as it is closely connected with that event." *Biography of Michael Madhusudan Dutt*, by Yogindranath Basu, 5th ed., Dey's Publishing, 2018, p. 159.
15. Basu, Vishnu. *Babu Theatre*. Pratibhas, 15 Apr. 1986, p. 81.
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17. Murshid, Gholam. *Ashar Chalane Buli*. p. 196.

18. "In response to this play, Bholanath Mukhopadhyay of Ahiritola wrote a farce called 'Kukhi Kukhi Bhakti'. It was performed at the Koylahata house of Hemendranath Mukhopadhyay, son-in-law of Devendranath Tagore."
19. Basu, Vishnu. *Babu Theatre*. Pratibhas, 15 Apr. 1986, p. 91.
20. Kaliprasanna Singha was the son of Nandalal Singha, the famous zamindar of Jorasanko. He translated the *Mahabharata* and distributed it for free. He also formed a literary society called 'Vidyotsahini Sabha.
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28. Ghosh, Ajitkumar. *Bangla Natak, Rangamanch and Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar*. Natya Akademi Patrika 2, 2nd issue, Sanat Kumar Chattopadhyay, West Bengal Natya Akademi, Department of Information and Culture Government of West Bengal, Jan. 1992, p. 69.
29. "First dramatization and acting: Kiranchandra Banerjee as Meghnad, Haridas as Lakshana, Biharilal Chattopadhyay as Mahadev."

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The TI Manifesto

THEATRE INTERNATIONAL, EAST-WEST Perspectives on Theatre: the title tells you where we are at. This is an international journal-cum-Drama book. In the constitution of its Editorial Board, in its wide-angle global readership, in its range and scope of subject matter and focus, in its selection of experts and specialist writers this publication caters to the frontierless international community of the Performing Arts and Artists.

This publication hopes to enrich the Indian theatre culture in concrete ways—for the present dramatic culture lacks a creative correlation between theory and praxis. Our connections and involvement in University Performing Arts, Drama and Literature Departments makes **Theatre International** favorably situated to bridge the grey areas between pedagogy and performance. On the other hand, theatre is ultimately performance. Hence papers and articles on the productional aspects will find valuable place in all issues of *TI*.

Moreover, the realization that the theatre cuts across both culture and history is evident in the works of our avant-garde theatre thinkers. The University Drama Departments have every access to and special avenues of communication with theatre movements throughout India and abroad. *TI* is committed to the task of making the necessary intercultural linkages and disseminating the available material to theatre enthusiasts and professionals here. Likewise, *TI* can help make the intelligentsia abroad aware of the Indian, Asian and African theatre scene. Hence *TI* can serve as a medium and forum for international cultural exchange.

Both our masthead and our readership include and span high-IQ decision makers in the performing arts spread across the five continents—University Faculty, members of Akademis and theater ensembles,

performing artists and intellectuals, the cultural avantgarde of Europe, America and Asia. The contents of *TI* will thus range from *Kathakali* to *Kabuki*, from the *Yakshagana* to the *Guerilla theatre*, from the *Peking Opera* to the performative processes of the *African folk traditions*, from Tagore to T. S. Eliot, Shakespeare to Stanislavsky, Kafka to Karnad, reflecting and embodying the creative thrust of the global theatre scene.

TI has published and will publish *Special Issues* in future on Brecht, Tagore, Folk theatre, Political theatre, Theatre and Film, Translation, Adaptation and, of course, on Shakespeare among other subject areas.

The Shakespeare Society of Eastern India, under whose aegis *TI* is being published, has helped spearhead the new resurgence of both academic and popular interest in Shakespeare that emerged from the mid-seventies throughout Bengal and India.

Editorial Note

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A Feast of Theatre and Performance, Research and Reviews,
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≡ UGC-CARE List, 2019

Sr.No.	Journal Title	Publisher	ISSN	E-ISSN	Action
1	International Journal of Cultural Studies and social Sciences	Avantgarde Press, Tagore-Gandhi Institute/Shakespeare Society	2347-4777	NA	View
2	Theatre International	Avantgarde Press, Tagore-Gandhi Institute/Shakespeare Society	2278-2036	NA	View

≡ UGC-CARE List, 2022

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159	International Journal of Cultural Studies and social Sciences	Avantgarde Press, Tagore-Gandhi Institute/Shakespeare Society	2347-4777	NA	View
400	Theatre International	Avantgarde Press, Tagore-Gandhi Institute/Shakespeare Society	2278-2036	NA	View

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436	Theatre International	Avantgarde Press, Tagore-Gandhi Institute/Shakespeare Society	2278-2036	NA	from January - 2020 to Present	View
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